Tracts for the Times

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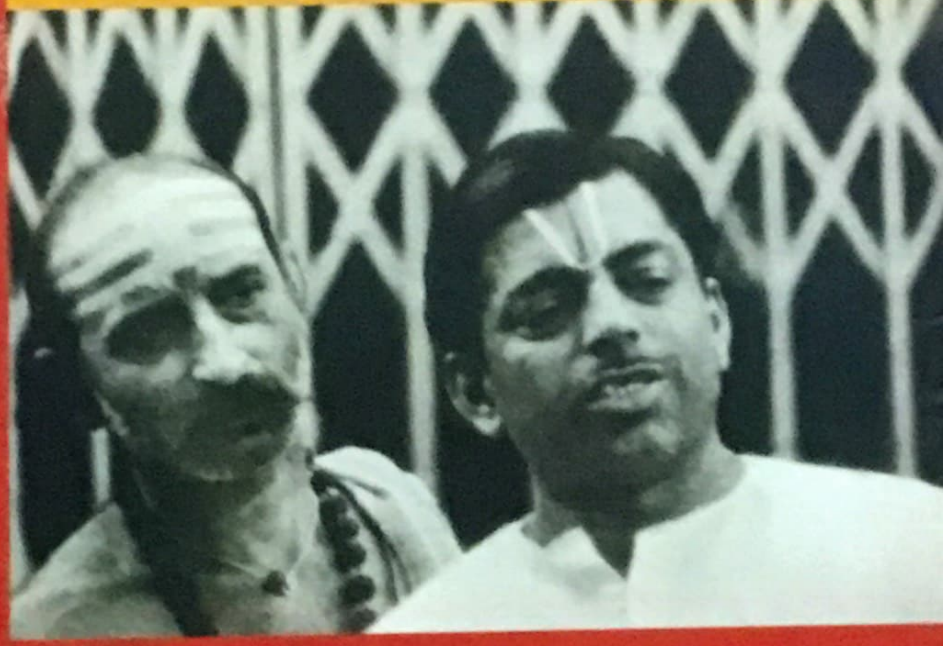
Hindi Nationalism



Alok Rai

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HINDI NATIONALISM

A retired professor of English, Alok Rai belongs to Allahabad—arguably, the heart of the Hindi heartland. He holds research degrees from the universities of Oxford and London, and is well known as a critic and writer on contemporary cultural matters. Earlier works by him have been published by Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press. To the matter of Hindi, however, he brings not only his academic training but also a very personal passion.

PRAISE FOR HINDI NATIONALISM

In this informed and impassioned polemic, Rai confronts the upper-caste, self-serving Hindi with its own history.

— Shahid Amin, *Outlook*

Alok Rai subverts the neat historical narratives that have been traditionally offered to us by opening our eyes to the naked truth. In this well-researched essay, he lays bare the arrogance, intellectual dishonesty and chauvinistic urges of the Hindiwallahs.

—Kuldeep Kumar, *Seminar*

Rai's book is a timely intervention in what has become an intractable debate on nation, language and the language of the nation.

—*Indian Review of Books*

Alok Rai's *Hindi Nationalism* is an erudite and impassioned plea to save the Hindi language. For anybody who has ever swayed to a Khusrau *qawali* or applauded the recitation of a Ghalib *sher*, or smiled at a Premchand story ... read this book.

—*tehelka.com*

A powerful and well-documented account of how colonial politics and the social pressures spawned by it caused the dispossession of pristine Hindi—the Indian lingua franca—by the all but incomprehensible modern Hindi of today . . . A book to stir the conscience of us all . . . it is written with passion and style.

—Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

HINDI NATIONALISM

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e-mail: centraloffice@orientblackswan.com

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Editorial Preface

TRACTS FOR THE TIMES attempts to provide meaningful information, critical perspectives, and theoretical reflections on various themes of contemporary concern. The tracts seek to deepen our knowledge of crucial issues, query our common sense, re-think old concepts and framing ideas, and analyse the social and economic problems we confront.

One of the problems that has plagued India after Independence is the question of a common language of communication and official discourse, a language through which India could define its identity. This was one of the most difficult problems debated by the Constituent Assembly. If there was to be one National Language in post colonial India, it could not be English—too visibly a language of privilege and too complicit in the project of colonialism. Hindi was the one language that could aspire to this exclusive national status. This appeared to be the consensus of the national movement. But as the politics of language unfolded, doubts and anxieties surfaced. Hindi came to be associated with the imperialism of the North, the chauvinism of Hindiwallahs. Anxious about their own linguistic identity and the threat of a continued linguistic subjection—now not to English but to a new master tongue—regional groups resisted Hindi's claim to power. Fifty years after Independence, some of the key issues of this linguistic politics have not yet been played out.

This tract by Alok Rai is a passionate defense of Hindi. But Rai's Hindi is the language of everyday life that had evolved in North India by the nineteenth century, a language variously and synonymously called Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani. It was a heteroglot, hybrid language that had absorbed the semantic resources of many traditions. In this sense, Hindi is different from the Sanskritised

and dePersianised Hindi, an impoverished new language, that Rai classifies as 'Hindi'. This 'Hindi' evolved in the twentieth century along with its opposite, 'Urdu', a distinct version of Hindustani burdened by an excess of Persianised words. Rai's plea for Hindi is at the same time a powerful polemic against 'Hindi', against the violence that the latter has inflicted on the former.

Rai's narrative is marked by a deep sense of loss: lost moments, blocked potentials, lost ideals. The blocked potential of Hindi, Rai believes, is a tragedy that will affect us all. The soul of Hindi has been corrupted, its true democratic potential perverted by a long history of deformation and confrontation. Rai's project is to redeem Hindi from its own past, to save it from its usurpers. Hindi is too important a heritage to be given over to the Hindiwallahs, or to those who harness it for the purposes of a poisonous politics. To redeem the language, we need not return to a mythic moment of origin, to discover a pure language untainted by the ugliness of subsequent history. We must begin with a reflexive return to the troubled history of the language, with all its complicities and ugliness, just as much as its creative moments. We must see how a popular language came to be fractured, splitting the language community into warring groups with opposing identities, how linguistic and religious identities merged, cross cut, and diverged, complicating the politics of language, communalising its history. When we constitute ourselves through language, we also constitute that language, marking it with the politics of the time. No language comes to us pre-formed, already constituted.

In tracing this complicated politics of language, Rai begins with the founding moment, 1900, when Sir Anthony MacDonnell, Lieutenant Governor of the North West provinces and Oudh, initiated a move to allow Devanagari to be used in the courts, inaugurating a long conflict over language and script. This move was presaged by a longer history of colonial interventions that sought to distinguish between a Hindu Hindustani and an Urdu Hindustani. Early in the nineteenth century Fort William College invented the idea of twoness, assuming that the appropriate language for Hindus is a Hindustani purged of Arabic/Persian words that were in use in the existing mixed language. The Serampore Mission, in its effort to produce a standardised grammar and language, created two languages: one divested of Perso-Arabic

borrowings for the Hindus, and the other filled with Persianised categories for Muslims. Systems of segregation in schools, and the nature of textbooks produced by Pandits and Maulvis, deepened the linguistic divide. Language and script came to be increasingly seen as markers of religious identity.

Yet the communalisation of the Hindu/Urdu controversy cannot be simply traced back to the divisive politics of colonial masters. The British, Rai is careful to emphasise, did not see Hindi and Urdu as irreducibly distinct languages. They believed in the idea of a single vernacular with two variations, drawing sustenance from two sources. To explain the sources of the deeper linguistic fracture, Rai looks at the complicated working of competitive elite politics, and caste and regional rivalries. The anxieties and ambitions of the North Indian Brahmin elite, tormented by the entrenched power of the Muslim upper classes and jealous of the Kayastha monopoly over the service sector, sustained the energies of the Nagari/Hindi movement. Devanagari was opposed not only to the Persian script, but also to Kaithi, a variant of the Nagari script that was popular amongst Muslims and Kayasthas. To displace a community, it was necessary to repress the assumed markers of its identity and the cultural basis of its power. The hostility towards the Persian script, coalesced with the attack against the syncretic culture associated with the hegemonic Avadh Muslim elite, fusing the issue of language and religion.

The tract explores with great sensitivity how the uncreated consciousness and culture of the bearers of modern Hindi was forged from the second half of the nineteenth century. It looks at the ways in which the Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia confronted and negotiated the experience of 1857—their sense of humiliation and wounded pride, their inner tensions, and their divergent solutions to civilisational dilemmas, with each group locating the sources of civilisational value in different pasts and comprehending cultural decay in distinct ways.

As the Hindi/Urdu conflict became acrimonious, 'Urdu' protagonists dismissed Hindi as rustic and uncouth, while 'Hindi' protagonists projected Urdu as the language of prostitutes. The charges were replayed in reverse in the Khari Boli/Braj controversy. To Braj advocates, Khari Boli, with its kinship to Urdu, could not

be the bearer of a Hindu identity; it was an uncouth language of the lowly people. For those who argued for Khari Boli, Braj could only express the mushy sensuousness of Krishna Bhakti, not the experience of everyday life. Through the anger and passion of these half-forgotten controversies, the identity of modern 'Hindi' emerged along with that of the 'Hindu community'.

The increasing power and ambitions of this 'Hindi' elite vitiated the politics of language after Independence. Rai captures with great effect the pathos of this history. In the post-Partition scenario, Hindustani inevitably suffered: its defense being seen as anti-national. The 'Hindi' elite, eager for power, sought to impose 'Hindi' on the nation as the national language. Charting the developments from the agonising Constituent Assembly debates on the language issues to the Angrezi Hatao Andolan of 1964, Rai reflects on the anxieties and ambivalences of the time, exploring the narrow-minded arrogance of the Hindiwallahs, the cultural assertions of linguistic groups, the predicaments of the English elite, the apprehensions of the moderates, and the anguish and pain of creative writers.

Rai, thus, is arguing for the Hindi which Bankim and Gandhi saw as the only possible national language of India. It was the popular heritage of the people of North India, their common language of collective communication enriched by the cultural resources of generations, by the sedimented traces of different traditions. This hybrid, heteroglot character, this productive admixture, is what defined the creativity of the language, its inner dynamism and life. To separate the traces, search for their origins and expunge those that are perceived as alien, hence unacceptable, is to destroy the language. A purified Hindi is a contradiction in terms. A hybrid, a heteroglot, cannot be purified; there is no pure essence waiting to be discovered, no pure trace that can be erased.

This multi-cultural language not only allowed dialogues between communities, it forged an emotional bond of shared memories and experiences. By contrast, 'Hindi', associated with the making of 'Hindi Nationalism', is a language splattered with the blood of innocents, tainted with the violence of our times. A dead language in the sphere of literary production, this 'Hindi' continues to have a poisonous presence in the cultural life of the society.

If Hindi has to realise its inner potential and become a national language of communication, argues Rai, then it has to emancipate itself from its own repressed history, and dissociate itself from 'Hindi'—a regional language invented by a self-seeking upper caste local elite desperate to exercise national dominance, Instead of being opposed to regional languages, Hindi has to ally with them, and allow them to acquire national presence. By bringing to light the violence that 'Hindi' has done to Hindi, this tract seeks to counter the politics of that violence, and create the possibilities of a renewal.

NEELADRI BHATTACHARYA

Preface

The matter of Hindi has received a fair amount of attention of late. Several scholarly books and essays have already appeared, others are in process. At one level, then, my essay is an attempt to synthesise this emergent understanding of a crucial passage of our modern cultural history, and situate it in a context of contemporary concern.

At another level, my involvement with these matters—the question of Hindi/Urdu, in short—is intensely personal. Among the many things that I inherited from my father, Amrit Rai, was a pile of books and notebooks, flagged and ready, littered all over his desk. When he was reduced to a sudden silence by the stroke that eventually claimed his life, he was at work on revising and expanding his monograph on these themes. (Published, originally, as *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi-Urdu*, Oxford University Press, 1984.) I hesitate to say that I have sought to complete the work that he left unfinished, not least because our discussions on these, and most other, matters were often marked by vociferous disagreement. On the other hand, there is a certain continuity of concern. His book ends, effectively, in 1870. My own story starts around then—concerned as I am not primarily with the *causes* of the linguistic division as with the *consequences*, often the *unintended* consequences, of that fateful division.

There is a deeper continuity, too—one that goes back, beyond my father, to *his* father. In his final dying years, plagued by ill-health, Premchand was still campaigning feverishly against the divisive tendencies that were, then as now, undermining the composite linguistic legacy of which he was both an exponent and a votary. In that personal and filial sense, then, I didn't choose the subject, it chose me. However, I must quickly add that this

filial obligation feels less like a privilege than a burden—one to which I feel confessedly inadequate. If this essay does no more than to bring the matter of Hindi into public consciousness, and encourage others more capable than I to reflect on these profoundly important matters, I will consider the (too many) years well-spent.

* * *

It is of the very nature of work such as this, that its world of reference is multi-lingual. My rough-and-ready translations will give English readers some idea of the original quotations. But the Nagari texts have been included, even at the risk of some visual dislocation, to enable most Indian readers, at any rate, to savour the tang of the original. Finally, in this kind of work, which touches on so many diverse areas, one incurs many different kinds of debt. The formal, academic ones are acknowledged in the appropriate places. At a personal level, I have puttered around in this domain for so long that I cannot hope even to remember the names of all the people with whom I have discussed these matters. I would nevertheless like to place on record the names of some of the people who have helped me in various ways, with books and papers, with sympathetic listening and with creative disagreements: Francesca Orsini, Sudipta Kaviraj, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Krishna Kumar, Hari Mohan Malaviya, Shahid Amin, Rajeev Bhargava, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Aijaz Ahmad...

It will remain a matter of lasting regret that this book will not be read by the one person who did more than any other, in one way and another, to make it both possible and, finally, ineluctable—my father, Amrit Rai. So, the last word's mine, then. At last. Alas.

New Delhi, April 2000 ALOK RAI

1

Introduction

The past is a foreign country, a foreign novel opens, they do things differently there. With us, as the last few years have demonstrated, it is different again: no past is ever past, no file is ever closed. In India *nothing* is ever done with: the "sack" of Somnath is "avenged", one thousand years later, in the fetid alleys of Bhagalpur, amid the squalor of Bombay. It appears as if all kinds of pasts, real and imagined, are in fact where we are happiest to live, backing fractiously into the future. It is almost as if the grammatical peculiarity of Hindi—its use of identical words for yesterday and tomorrow—has infected our politics, so that our contests for possible futures take on the appearance of, indeed often become, vendettas over bits and pieces of the past.

The apparently distant history which is my theme, these long-done controversies—concerning the appropriate script for use in the courts of the British Raj, the appropriate language for poetry, the value of unnecessarily *alternative* classical heritages (Sanskrit *or* Persian?)—are not really *distant* at all. It isn't merely long memories that are at play—the constantly renewed experience of hurt and humiliation, an abstract historical rage seeking an adequate object—though there is that also. It is my argument that this history is an important—if relatively neglected—part of the *unfinished* project of Indian nationalism. The crystallisation of the self-consciousness of the Hindi belt intelligentsia, and the related making of the tributary stream of Hindi nationalism—which is

related to, but not identical with *Hindu* nationalism[1] are deeply consequential processes, even if, *and particularly when*, they are not given due recognition, proper cognizance. These must be brought into consciousness, worked through and not repressed, if they are not to continue leaking their poisons into the body politic.

The matter of Hindi has been agitating the public life of the country, in several different ways, for the past hundred years at least. And one may well wish that now, poised on the cusp of the twenty-first century, this particular file could be closed. After all, it is universally agreed that the emerging *lingua mundo* is English. And all classes of people in all parts of the country are desperate to learn English, as the rash of canonisations manifest in the names of mofussil primary schools, the Saint This and the Saint That, demonstrates with such pathetic clarity. My particular favourite is Saint Marry, emblazoned just after Suberdarganj, on the right of the Delhi-Allahabad railway track.

Is it possible, then, that the matter of Hindi will simply fall away—become but another piece of historical baggage that we will shed as we hasten onwards? Will Hindi dwindle and become merely another flavour in the advertisers' culinary kit, a spice casually sprinkled to appeal to special, ethnic audiences—*Yeh dil maange more*, so to speak? Or is the matter of Hindi simply the visible—more precisely, audible, vocal—form of a range of unrest and social dysfunction which, if unattended to, will threaten those glowing daydreams, that millennial future?

In one sense, certainly, Hindi—the matter of Hindi—is merely a symptom of a wide range of social distress, a shorthand way of naming and focussing several different kinds of unease: metropolitan unease regarding the laggard, draggy hinterland; mofussil anxiety regarding what appears increasingly like an elite hijack of the Indian State; "Southern" suspicion regarding "Northern" domination; cow-belt restiveness about its own evident, and even intentional marginalisation. However, I would argue further that the matter of "Hindi" is also the preferred route by which we may begin to address some of the causes of our present distress. Properly understood, properly deployed, Hindi can also play an invaluable part in the process of necessary social transformation; neglected, forsworn, abandoned, it can be, and perhaps already *is* being, deployed in the service of other, ugly

transformations. Thus, Hindi is the name of the disease. It is also, I suggest, one of the names or ingredients of the cure. That makes writing about these matters particularly difficult. However, before addressing these matters directly, here's an anecdote which encapsulates, for me at least, some of the underlying themes of my narrative.

* * *

It is a winter morning in Delhi: on Safdar Hashmi Marg, outside the SriRam Cultural Centre, the open space which is already, given the depth of our current "traditions", traditionally Sahmat's own. A motley and hastily assembled group of people is protesting the rumoured (and later denied) official ban on Salman Rushdie's *Moor* by publicly reading short sections from the book. It is a pleasant and harmless sort of occasion, a classic demonstration of liberal symbolic politics, interesting only in as much as many of the people gathered there would be self-styled radicals. The really interesting action, from my point of view, is taking place at some distance from the protest venue, where a small group of Hindi intellectuals, including one vociferous short story writer, is protesting against the protest itself. He is *not* a Shiv Sena supporter, fulminating in defence of his lampooned leader, Thackeray-Mainduck; he is not even closet-BJP, flashing his wares in the hope of finding takers or creating a distraction. He is a pained Hindi liberal—and what pains him is the fancied hegemony that is being demonstrated, he feels, at the protest site. A tiny and unrepresentative elite, he feels, is taking upon itself a cultural-political role, out of all proportion to its numbers. His resentment is vindicated by the fact that the protest, which includes some familiar names and faces, is featured briefly on the national media.

The irony is that if he would only stop to listen, he would find that many of the loathed English speakers would actually *agree* with him. Of course the English speaking elite exercises a wildly disproportionate social influence—though one may well wonder if the impugned protesters are a representative sample of that influential elite. Of course, also, that the popular energies that can be mobilised and focussed through Hindi could constitute a transformative force in our national life. Thus, a significant part

of the success of the BJP is due to the fact that for a long time, the field of vernacular mobilisation in the heartland was left clear for them. Though he does not voice his anguish in these terms, it is clear that such indeed are the elements that constitute his liberal bewilderment.

There is a very real sense in which the matter of Hindi is blocked. There is hardly any discussion possible any more: the Hindi-wallah feels paranoid and dispossessed, convinced that his case—Hindi as the one and only national language, here, now!—is so palpably justified that anyone who demurs ever so slightly is certainly in bad faith, and probably an enemy. And any attempts to open the matter up to rational and historical consideration soon come to naught, begin to seem blocked and merely frustrating, a neurotic waste of energy. In such a situation, it doesn't take a great deal to convince the *non*-Hindiwallah that the matter of Hindi is dead, and should be buried quickly, along with the rogues who have fed at the trough of Hindi for all these years.

There are two, widely different reactions whenever the matter of "Hindi" is broached: all those who are connected with Hindi-Urdu in any way whatsoever fall instantly into passionate contention; others, who are outside this furious circle are totally bemused. (Even in the Constituent Assembly debates—see below, pp. 110–14—the matter aroused such strong feelings that it endangered the constitution-making process itself, and discussion had to be deferred until the very end, when much of the essential business was already in the bag, so to speak.) Even the simplest questions beget further controversy, but no clarification. Thus, consider the following elementary queries: are Hindi and Urdu two names of the same language, or are they two different languages? does Urdu become Hindi if it is written in the Nagari script? is Hindi Hindu? is Urdu Muslim, even though Muslims in distant Malabar have been known to claim it as their mother tongue? The only reasonable, *and maddening*, answer to all these questions is, well, yes and no. In respect of neither Hindi nor Urdu can one give an unambiguous answer: one has to go into the historical detail to explain how/why it isn't; and then, in the space of a few decades, why it is. I hope indeed that my own intervention in this contentious domain is not uninformed by passion—but one

of the avowed objects of this monograph is to provide some historical elucidation, some basic clarification for my much put-upon friends from other parts of the country, who have sat through many heated, futile, blocked arguments—deriving from them only a deeper conviction of the perverseness of the cow-belt and its intelligentsia.

I am convinced that this blockage is a tragedy, and that its consequences—first- and second-order—will affect all of us, whether or not we believe that the matter of Hindi concerns us at all. The error that the Hindiwallah makes is to believe that the story of this historical stalemate is simply the story of an anti-Hindi conspiracy by a gaggle of the English elite, successors of the Urdu-wielding Avadh elite of yesteryear; that in fact this story is somehow complete without talking reflexively about the history of Hindi itself; that the curious persistence of English in our India is not, in some sense, a *symptom* of some larger default. The Hindiwallah is altogether too conscious of the fact that Hindi is, given the particular nature of its being, its evolution and history, an unquestionably important part of the *solution*. What he is unable to see is that *Hindi is also, again because of the particular nature of its being, its evolution and history, an inescapable part of the problem.*

Historically speaking, Hindi has been understood, defined and projected through a series of antitheses: with Urdu; with its "dialects", notably Braj; with the "provincial" languages; with English. We shall have occasion to return to some of these antitheses at greater length later. For now, it is sufficient to remark that in all these antitheses, with their countless local eruptions, there is a curious assumption of innocence and inviolability on the part of Hindi and its protagonists. It is almost as if the antitheses do not have a retrospective and dialectical effect on Hindi itself: *it* is always-already in a state of achieved and stainless perfection. As far as the Hindiwallah is concerned, Hindi *has* no history—there is only the endlessly reiterated history of the "wrongs" that have been done to Hindi. But despite all the alleged violence, Hindi still remains miraculously inviolate. This is, of course, nonsense.

The suspect vehemence with which the Hindiwallah perceives the threat without—Urdu yesterday, English today—indicates a neurotic need to escape from *its* intrinsic difficulties. These difficulties derive from its own troubled (and repressed) history,

from the deeply divided historical legacy which makes it only *partly* popular, democratic, reformist, progressive. But there is an undeniable other part that is conservative, retrogressive, reactionary. What we need to do is to recover a sense of Hindi as not a constant but a dynamic entity which is, in the course of its *continuing* history, defined by its preferred antitheses, its chosen others—but the process of definition, of struggle over the language, is far from over. The question must be faced squarely: in what ways have these antitheses, this history of confrontations, entered and affected, infected and corrupted the soul of Hindi?

I understand my own project as one of trying to redeem Hindi from its own history—to do what little I can to enable Hindi to think about its troubled past so that it can begin the process of shedding it, and so reclaim its rightful destiny, enable it to assume its historic, and historical, responsibility. [More polemically, my project may be understood as one of seeking to free Hindi from the clutches of the professional Hindiwallahs—to enable the language to break free of its sanctimonious abductors, the entrenched elites at Nagari Pracharini Sabha (hereafter NPS) and Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (hereafter HSS) which have done so much to darken Hindi's name.] Because, as I have said already, our redemption—as lovers of Hindi, as English elite, or even plain Indians—is inconceivable without the healthy harnessing of the energies which Hindi can command.

Far from being the detested usurpers that they are perceived to be, large sections of the English elite will, I am convinced, actually welcome it if Hindiwallahs could position themselves to claim their rightful popular heritage, and so counter the reactionary and communal threat that is emerging from the abandoned vernacular domain.[2] If only Hindi would own up to its historic responsibility—*if only Hindi could*—the beleaguered English elite would be freed to relinquish its increasingly untenable position. But for it to be able to do that, Hindi would have to own up to, and work through its vexed historical past, to move beyond the dismay and the helpless anger in which it finds itself trapped at present. This tract aspires to be a small step in that direction.

* * *

Today Hindi is a bit of a lost cause. And, given the greedy and semi-literate whining of the average Hindi protagonist, one is inclined to say, Amen. However, it is important to see that this is unfortunate. The continued dominance of the English elite can only end in tragedy—not least for that elite itself. For all the recent flurry of brave noises in the media and elsewhere about English being an Indian language, really—*which it is*—there is no getting away from the fact that it is *also* the language of privilege:

> पुराने समय में आर्य और अनार्य का भेद था, आज अंग्रेज़ीदाँ और ग़ैर अंग्रेज़ीदाँ का भेद है।[3]
>
> In olden times, there was discrimination between the Aryan and the non-Aryan, today it exists between those who know English and those who don't.

The fact of this obscene and absurd privilege, happening as it is in a desperately poor country, gives Hindi—English's "other"—an unearned and undeserved moral advantage.[4] Hindi becomes, by default, the language of the disinherited masses. The English elite, hobbled by its entirely well-deserved bad conscience, is not really in a position to challenge or even to scrutinize this moral advantage. The social privilege enjoyed by this elite becomes, in turn, a serious liability for the secular and modern value package espoused by them.

So long as the reactionary NPS/HSS Hindiwallahs are left in a position to speak for and to appropriate Hindi's energies, the "English" struggle for "secular values" must, willy-nilly, be counterposed *against* Hindi. The English elite will be condemned to confront in the political battlefield the popular energies which Hindi can command with relative ease. The strategic location of the English elite in the apparatuses of power may delay the day of reckoning. But minus Hindi, *fighting* Hindi, they and their cherished "values" are fighting a losing battle.

In any case, the bad conscience of the English elite is a very poor weapon to go into battle with: it cannot make the crucial discriminations, or probe the historical foundations of Hindi's vaunted moral advantage. As things stand today, the linguistic situation is framed between the bad conscience of the English elite and the hypocrisy and bad faith of the aspirant Hindi elite. I must

clarify quickly that the struggle—*my struggle*—is not *against* Hindi; it is *for* Hindi. But this very struggle for Hindi requires that we understand its history—so that we may carry forward the democratic impulse that it once gave voice to.

* * *

For as long as anyone can remember, Hindi has always been in a state of war. Indeed, the history of its modern definitions consists of precisely such a chain of violent antitheses. However, this prolonged emergency has exacted a heavy price: compulsory silence, necessary amnesia. Thus, a species of moral bullying has been used, again and again, to silence any process of critical enquiry into the historical formation of modern Hindi. The prize which the Hindiwallahs lust after—*truly* national-language status, *rashtrabhasha*!—has tantalisingly eluded their grasp. But their very hunger therefore has become an argument for the suppression of all moderating or complicating voices.

I should enter a word of caution here regarding the casual deployment of the notions of the English elite and also the Hindi elite. The social presence of English in India is so varied that the notion of an English elite is self-evidently problematical. There are social classes whose sole cultural stock in trade is their ability to gabble in a sort of English. But there are others who, while they are obviously beneficiaries of English and of its dominance, can also see that the overwhelming social dominance of English is a threat to certain *other* things which they value—like secularism, like the struggle for a modern society committed to working for equality, fairness and justice for all. If it is the case, as I believe it is, that the association with English and the class that lives off English has become a serious liability for those valued goals, then the commitment to English must be radically reexamined. "The English elite" subsumes both groups and I can only hope that the different contexts will make it apparent in which sense, inclusive or exclusive, I am using the phrase.

There is also an ambiguity in using the phrase "the Hindi elite". In the early period, before modern "Hindi" has been invented, as it were, there is an elite which fashions this politico-cultural instrument in order to further its ambitions of entering and then

becoming the ruling class. In the period after about 1937, there is an elite, mainly Hindi heartland *savarna*, which makes "Hindi" into a huge zamindari which it farms for personal profit at various levels. These are not merely the cow-belt demagogues and the great magnates of the NPS and the HSS, but also, in independent India, the Hindi officers and their clerks, the child-tormenting pedants, and all those who derive from their ability to mouth the Sanskritic sounds of "Hindi" a sense of wronged virtue. It will be apparent that there is a kind of continuity across the two halves of the ambivalence of "the Hindi elite"—the proto- and the entrenched—but no single phrase can hope to capture its internal diversity. Once again, the context will help to identify the particular fraction that is being addressed.

It is important also, finally, to interrogate the apparent *opposition* between the Hindi and the English elites. For all their snapping and mutual contempt, it is possible to see that their joint operation, albeit in a relationship of *nominal* hostility, preserves advantages for both of them. Similar false oppositions—say between politicians and bureaucrats, forever pointing fingers at each other—disguise the reality of a *collusive* ruling class. Dismantling the facade of the English/Hindi confrontation in today's situation is a way of confronting the reality of the linguistic situation, of seeing through the restless, futile and entirely predictable controversies—the arguments of insidious intent which lead nowhere. In paranoid moods, one may well see a sort of "collusion" between the two elites. It suits the English elite to accept the "Hindi" elite as the representatives of popular democratic energies—since the acceptance demands no radical social transformation. And as for the "Hindi" elite, its politics consists almost entirely of pretending to *represent* those democratic energies even as they seek to *contain* them—and so preserve *its* precarious dominance. The English elite cannot—and will not—call the Hindiwallah's bluff. It is inhibited by its bad conscience, plus the possible recognition that its own long-term interests lie with the Hindi elite. The Hindi elite in turn cannily plays, or retains the option to play, the democratic card from time to time.

It would perhaps not be unfair to say that this "collusion" rests on a potent combination of pseudo-secularism and pseudo-democracy. Thus, the secularism of the English elite is often merely

tactical and opportunist —an ideological means of ensuring that the processes of exploitative surplus appropriation can be carried on unhindered by social disruption. But this "pseudo"-secularism serves nevertheless to keep the Hindi elite at bay by exposing, periodically, and in different ways, their unfitness for power. It is in this sense that a certain ritually proclaimed commitment to "secularism" and "scientific temper" has become the legitimating ideology of the English-gabbling ruling class. The "pseudo-democracy" of the Hindi elite, on the other hand—populist, conservative and even reactionary—still serves to remind the English elite of the narrowness of its democratic base and so of the precarious and *necessarily collusive* nature of its dominance.

2

What's in a Name?

There is a fundamental terminological difficulty that dogs any attempt to write about the making of modern Hindi, particularly about what is certainly the most crucial historical passage in this process: the Hindi-Urdu struggle of the later nineteenth century. It is, at one level, a specific instance of the general problem, that the language that one uses is, perforce, a language that one shares with other users. Words mean what one wants them to mean, *and* what others want them to mean. Meaning is, in some sense, a conspiracy: one which both includes and excludes, conspiracy *with*, and conspiracy *against*. So it is with names, particularly when those names are used to designate overlapping parts of a single linguistic continuum. Thus, north Indians are frequently disconcerted at being complimented by Pakistanis on their command of Urdu, Pakistan's national language. Because of course, they think that they are using Hindi, India's notional national language. Of course, it is just as possible for the same person, on the basis of the same linguistic performance, to be accused by the Hindi extremist or the Urdu extremist of using some language *other* than the one of which the extremist is the jealous custodian. Thus, one man's Hindi is another man's Urdu. And vice versa.

Still, Gandhi was not being devious or disingenuous when he wrote, in the *Harijan Sevak* of 3 April 1937, about "the Hindi language, which we have come to call Hindustani and Urdu also..." The ambiguity is intrinsic to this domain. In 1918, sometime before

delivering the Presidential Address at the Indore conference of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Gandhi wrote to Rabindranath Tagore: "Is not Hindi (as *bhasha* or Urdu) the only possible national language...?"[1] neatly begging the questions that were to cause such ructions in the Constituent Assembly debates of 1949! Even Purushottam Das Tandon, who sponsored the Kanpur Congress resolution that the Indian National Congress must endeavour to conduct its business in Hindustani, clarified later that he meant it, *at that time*, to mean both Hindi and Urdu.[2] The ambiguity is inescapable—if also occasionally serviceable, as in the Tandon example. But it makes writing about the process of linguistic contention and differentiation rather slippery.

Some of this ambiguity derives from the process of linguistic evolution which these different names address. It is easy to get lost in the hypnotic mists of ancient India: here venerable dinosaurs do battle, or more often opine, perched on slender reeds of evidence. However, there is general agreement that some kind of *ur*-language emerged, combining diverse cultural influences, sometime in the first millennium. This history is part of the romance of India, the mingling of civilisations, the evolution of a rich, loamy cultural pluralism—

> कारवाँ बसते गए, हिन्दोस्ताँ बनता गया।
> The caravans rested, then settled down; And thus became-Hindustan...

Rahul Sankrityayana writes about this *ur*-language, which he calls Hindi, thus: "Hindi incorporates all the languages which emerged after the eighth century A.D. in 'Suba Hindustan'—the region that is bounded by the Himalayas, and by all the regions associated with the Punjabi, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Oriya and Bangla languages. Its older form is called Magahi, Maithili, Braj Bhasha, etc. Its modern form may be considered under two aspects: a widely disseminated form called Khari Boli (which when written in Persian characters and with an excess of Arabic and Persian words is called Urdu), and the various local languages which are spoken in different places: Magahi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Banarasi, Avadhi, Kannauji, Brajmandali, etc..."[3]

Obviously, this *ur*-language must have gone through many mutations in the course of its evolution into modern India's

linguistic variety, but evidence of a kind of persistence, too, is plentiful. Gilchrist, writing in the late-eighteenth century, cites H.T. Colebrooke on this "elegant language which is used in every part of Hindoostan and the Dukhin, which is the common vehicle of intercourse among all well-educated natives and among the illiterate also, in many provinces of India; and which is almost everywhere intelligible to some among the inhabitants of every village..."[4] G.A.Grierson in his monumental *Linguistic Survey of India* writes: 'It is thus commonly said, and believed, that throughout the Gangetic Valley, between Bengal and the Punjab, there is one and only one language—Hindi, with its numerous dialects.'[5] Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, travelling across India in 1869, found evidence of this same "middle" tongue:

> बन्दा ने इलाहाबाद से बंबई तक क्या गाँव में और क्या चौकियात में और क्या रेल में और क्या गौरन्मेंट के अहलकारों और हर महकमे के चपरासियों और हरेक जगह के कुलियों से उर्दू में गुफ्तगू की–सब लोग हर जगह बखूबी समझते थे और उर्दू ही में जवाब देते थे। बाज़–बाज़ लफ्ज़ों के मुकर्रर समझाने की और ज्यादातर आसान तौर पर बयान करने की ज़रूरत पड़ती थी। कुछ शुबहा नहीं कि तमाम हिन्दोस्तान में उर्दू ज़बान इस तरह समझी और बोली जाती है।[6]
> All the way from Allahabad to Bombay, in villages and marketplaces and trains, with Government officials and peons of all departments and coolies everywhere, I conversed in Urdu—and everywhere people understood and replied in Urdu itself. With some words, there was a need to explain the meaning, or sometimes to state one's meaning more simply. But there is no doubt that everywhere in Hindustan the Urdu language is understood and spoken...

The point to note, of course, is that Sir Syed identifies this language, lineal descendant of Rahul's Hindi, as Urdu!

* * *

Tara Chand, the historian, offers some timely terminological clarification.[7] He distinguishes three different usages of the term Hindi:

1. Hindi is used to designate a group of dialects, Grierson's

Tertiary Prakrits, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee's "New Indo-Aryan Languages", Rahul's "Hindi";

2. Hindi denotes things Indian. As such, it came to be used, from the earliest period of Muslim contact, for the dialect that emerged through this process of cultural mixing. Amir Khusrau, for instance, called the language of his non-Persian compositions Hindi, as did Ghalib. Needless to say, this Hindi could also be called Urdu, as Sir Syed does;
3. the third use of Hindi is for the modern language which is the literary form of the north Indian vernacular Hindustani or Khari Boli.

Thus, if one looks for the antecedents of modern Hindi—no. 3, above—one encounters Urdu—i.e. Hindi no. 2. And if one looks for old Urdu, alas, one finds Hindi no. 1![8] This shared cultural inheritance causes endless anxiety and embarrassment when linguistic politics gets under way. Hindi ideologues invent a fanciful Sanskrit lineage, bypassing Hindi no.2 and sometimes even the Prakrits. Urdu ideologues bypass Hindi no.1, and concoct some Arabo-Persian lineage. It is against such Urdu ideologues that Abdul Haq declared in 1914: "... there can be no doubt that Urdu is born of Hindi."[9] Equally unambiguously, Chandradhar Sharma Guleri, author of the monumental *Purani Hindi* declared that modern Hindi is born of Urdu! He writes:

> खड़ी बोली या पक्की बोली या रेख़्ता या वर्तमान हिन्दी के आरंभ काल के गद्य और पद्य को देखकर यही जान पड़ता है कि उर्दू रचना में फ़ारसी-अरबी तत्सम या तद्भवों को निकालकर संस्कृत या हिन्दी तत्सम या तद्भव रखने से हिन्दी बना ली गयी है।[10]
>
> On studying the early prose and verse of Khari boli or authentic boli or Rekhta or present-day Hindi, it becomes apparent that Hindi was made by a process of taking Urdu and the Perso-Arabic borrowings, both tatsama and tadbhava, and replacing them with Sanskrit or Hindi tatsamas or tadbhavas.

But the absurd genealogies find their legitimation and fulfilment, nevertheless, in the "purist" registers *invented* by the ideologues—Pandit-Hindi, and Maulavi-Urdu.

To bring this brief but ineluctable terminological excursus to

a close, I am writing this essay out of a conviction that there is but one common language of north India, which has at different times and by different people, been described as Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani. (There are other names also: thus, Hindavi, or Rekhta i.e. mixed, hybrid, or simply *bhasha* i.e. language.) In the course of history, some of which I will address later, the fact of this common shared language has been sought to be denied. In the service of ulterior agendas, particular ends of this linguistic continuum have been sought to be hived off and infected with, on the one hand, Sanskritic, and on the other, Perso-Arabic borrowings. These latter processes have led to the emergence of two identifiable styles or registers, which I identify as "Hindi" and "Urdu" respectively.

The substrate middle language which supports these stylistic variants, I wish to identify as Hindi—*without inverted commas*. I do this to indicate affinity with the implicit suggestion of the fertile plains of north India which were the site of that prolonged process of cultural mixing which produced that substrate language. Further, the use of the name Hindi for this language—used, it needs to be said, by Hindus and Muslims alike—is older than the nasty controversies that engulfed this domain towards the end of the last century.

It is implicit in the account of linguistic evolution that I have indicated briefly above that this substrate language—the linguistic basis of Hindi no.3—could also be called Urdu. Indeed, this suggestion was even offered as a nominalistic compromise by none other than Madan Mohan Malaviya himself.[11] However, this Urdu would have to be distinguished sharply from "Urdu", the barbarous Perso-Arabicized dialect of the mullahs religious and secular. Further, the etymological connection of the name "Urdu" with "military camp" is unhelpful in designating a peaceable cultural legacy and must, for me, yield to the name Hindi.

* * *

Another terminological compromise, proposed by none other than Gandhi, was Hindustani—the language of Hindustan. However, this Hindustani could mean either that overlapping part of the linguistic continuum which was *common* to both "Hindi" and

"Urdu"—in which case it designated the people's language, vigorous, flexible, versatile. Or, crucially, it could mean that part of the continuum which was *neither* "Hindi" nor "Urdu", in which case it tended to disappear altogether, to the great delight of the fanatics on both sides. Because of course, in that embattled context, when the *dissension* was what was driving the politics in the first place, the terminological compromise of Hindustani left both sides dissatisfied and suspicious: each saw Hindustani as a Trojan horse of the other side! Consider the fate, in this kind of force-field, of Gandhi's compromise formulation: "Hindi *or* Hindustani". That "or" could connote either *alterity* or *identity*. It could mean either that Hindi was the *same* as Hindustani, in which case the mullah was up in arms; or that Hindustani was an *alternative* to Hindi, in which case the pandit, quite as suspicious and pugnacious, concluded that Hindustani was mere camouflage for Urdu! The terminological difficulty is acute, and it has led one exasperated scholar to propose that the contested middle language be called Hirdu![12] However, I have no doubt that someone would call this a biased compromise, and propose the alternative of Urdi...

Considering that the boundary markers can be moved around at will by every passing controversialist, it is not surprising that this dispute has proved so resistant to resolution—perhaps even to adequate description. It is after all a rather special kind of boundary dispute—due at least in part to the fact that there *is* no boundary, but different groups of people have at different times found it expedient to insist that there is or ought to be one.

From a strictly linguistic point of view, of course, it is not very important what this common language is called. But I am aware that this matter of naming—Hindi or Urdu—is something which people have been, and perhaps still are, willing to kill, and die, for. Further, my own argument is concerned less with linguistics than it is with the reasons and consequences, even linguistic consequences, of people treating these unimportant matters—what's in a name?—as if they mattered. Still, for all the fussy precision that I might bring to my use of the terms, carefully distinguishing Hindi from "Hindi", I suspect that the difficulty won't simply go away. But it just might consent to lying down and being stroked, as it were.

3

The MacDonnell Moment

In 1900, at the inauguration of what is universally known as the Hindu Hostel of the University of Allahabad—which was set up as a result of the fund-raising efforts of that indefatigable fund-raiser Madan Mohan Malaviya—Sir Anthony MacDonnell, Lieutenant Governor of NWP&O, was the guest of honour. Malaviya had good reason to be grateful to MacDonnell—because, only a short while ago, MacDonnell had initiated what was certainly the most fateful decision in the evolution of modern Hindi and, *arguably*, in the history of modern India itself. On 18 April 1900, MacDonnell issued the fateful order allowing the permissive—but not exclusive—use of Devanagari in the courts of the Province. This was the deceptively thin end of the wedge that was, ultimately, to result in the Partition of India. Today, Sir Anthony MacDonnell has all but faded from the memory of modern Hindi, the plaque that commemorates that inaugural moment is chipped and practically invisible behind the weeds. And the hostel has been formally renamed after Malaviya.

* * *

The immediate cause for the sudden salience of what was called "the vernacular question" in nineteenth century India had to do, in fact, with the blameless sentiment uttered by the Court of Directors of the East India Company in 1832, that while it was "highly important that justice be delivered in a language familiar

to the judge", it was just as important that it be "administered in a language familiar to the people at large..."[1] The policy directive went on to say: "it is easier for a judge to acquire the language of the people than for the people to acquire the language of the judge." (Or, we "Hindi"-afflicted ones might add today, "for the people to acquire the language of the people".) It was this policy objective, to replace Persian with the local vernaculars in the territories under Company administration, that unleashed the profoundly consequential cultural dynamic that was to work its diverse way for the rest of the century—and indeed, beyond.

The agitation for the recognition of Nagari/Hindi sputtered on and off for much of the last four decades of the nineteenth century. But for at least two years prior to 1900, there had been a massive mobilization of people all over the Province in support of the demand that Nagari/Hindi be accorded official recognition in the business of colonial administration—specifically, in the courts. (Ostensibly, the agitation was concerned only with the script, but the idea of another language too is often there at least implicitly.) On 2 April 1900, the Hindi periodical *Bharat Jiwan* even called upon its readers to organize public demonstrations in support of the Lt. Governor—a distinctly curious exhortation. What was ostensibly at issue was the eagerly anticipated permission to use "the Nagari character"—Devanagari to us today—in addition to "the Persian character"—Urdu to modern Indians—in the courts, but by implication more generally in the colonial administration.

The fact is that, well before 1900, MacDonnell was already something of a folk-hero in Nagari/Hindi circles. After all, he came to NWP&O with his Bihari reputation. As Officiating Secretary to the Lt. Governor of Bengal, MacDonnell had been actively involved with the introduction of the Nagari character in the courts and administration of Bihar. There is a farcical story, recounted in Hali's biography of Sir Syed, about how the visiting Lt. Governor of Bengal (Campbell?) was presented a formal address by the Scientific Society of Bhagalpur, a largely Muslim association. The demand for the vernacularisation of the colonial administration was rumbling in the background here as well. The formal address of welcome was composed strenuously in a language heavily laden with grandiloquent Arabic and Persian, and the good Campbell

understood nary a word. Incensed, he declared that *that* language could never be the vernacular of the province, and "within a few days" he issued orders allowing the use of the Nagari character and "that language which can be written in this character" in the courts of Bihar.[2] Hali records that many Muslims and "respectable Hindus" petitioned against the orders, but the Lt. Governor was unmoved.

In 1882, the National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta even preferred a Memorial to the Governor General himself. In this, against the highly significant background of the generally miserable condition of the Muslims of India as a whole, a plea was made in favour of retaining the language and the script—Persian/Urdu—which, it was urged, was popular with the *educated* classes of Bihar, Hindu and Muslim alike. MacDonnell was instrumental in the dismissive rejection of this petition.[3] There is reason to believe that his Bihari experience might well have made MacDonnell suspicious of, and hostile towards, the Muslim elite which was so prominent in the colonial administration of north India. On 22 August 1897, while he was still Lt. Governor of NWP&O, MacDonnell wrote to Lord Elgin that "the strong position of the Muslims was a risk to security" and "decreed that the ratio of Muslims to Hindus should be reduced to three to five."[4] On 18 May 1900, while his fateful order was awaiting ratification by the Governor-General, MacDonnell wrote to Curzon: "We are far more interested in [encouraging] a Hindu predominance than in [encouraging] a Mahomedan predominance, which, in the nature of things, must be hostile to us."[5]

The Nagari/Hindi propagandists of the province, then, had every reason to believe that the appointment of MacDonnell as the Lt. Governor of NWP&O was a godsend. In his speech to the Banaras Municipality delivered shortly after his arrival, in 1895, MacDonnell left his auditors in no doubt as to where his sympathies lay:

> Crossing the Ganges for the first time by the Dufferin Bridge, I was struck with the beauty of the view ... and my eye naturally rested on the most prominent objects in the landscape—the graceful minarets of Aurangzeb's mosque and the solid Dufferin bridge. The thought at once occurred to me that each was typical of an era and of a policy. In the minarets towering over Hindu shrines which were of hoary

antiquity before the Prophet began his mission, I saw a symbol of the disdainful and inconsiderate spirit of late Mughal rule, which imposed restraints on conscience and excluded the larger section of the community from their natural rights.

In the Bridge, I saw the latest product of material civilization ... The effect of this newer civilization is to mitigate animosities, to make one sect tolerant towards another, and to stimulate all in the direction of material prosperity.[6]

MacDonnell's rosy evaluation of the likely effects of colonial intervention—imminent prosperity against a background of social harmony—must be deemed something of a professional hazard, obligatory sales patter. In point of fact, MacDonnell's intervention is a crucial, even inaugural, moment in a durable and long-running process of the invention and exacerbation of animosities. My immediate purpose, now, is to flashback from this inaugural moment, and indicate something of the pattern of historical necessity, of action and reaction, which underlay MacDonnell's famous order. Only then will we be able to understand the unstoppable and frightening consequence that it acquired subsequently.

* * *

It is merely a truism to say that almost everything that happens in colonial (and post-colonial, once-colonised) societies, can be traced back to colonial intervention. It is no surprise to discover, therefore, that in the matter of the Hindi-Urdu contention too, the dread hand of the British is frequently identified as being at the root of the conflict. And, be it said, with some justification. But colonial practice, whether malign or merely absent-minded, is necessary but crucially insufficient as an explanation of what we are trying to understand.

There are, meanwhile, two observations to be made with regard to the almost unconscious resort to colonial explanation. One, that "colonial" explanation has an oddly consoling quality about it. It locates the source of the evil *outside* and implicitly exonerates the "native" perpetrators and collaborators. But just as significantly, it implies a possible recognition by all sides to this conflict that there is some evil, some malignity that needs to be explained, some loss that needs to be accounted for. The desire

to find a culprit must necessarily imply that a crime has been committed, is *being* committed.

The prime candidates for initiating the modern process of linguistic division in respect of Hindi-Urdu are, by popular consent, the pedants of Fort William College. John Borthwick Gilchrist, a surgeon and itinerant linguist adrift in late eighteenth century North India, conceived the project of setting up a "seminary" in which the newly-appointed officers of the East India Company could be taught Hindustani. However, this projected "seminary" was soon overtaken by the establishment under official aegis of the College of Fort William in 1800, in which Gilchrist was appointed the Professor of Hindustani. Here he supervised a staff of Indian scholars and translators. These were soon engaged in putting together a corpus of works from which the budding officers of the Company Bahadur could learn Hindustani before setting forth on the uncharted linguistic seas of North India.[7] Of these scholars, at least two were to produce works that figure in the making of modern Hindi—Khan, Sadal Misra and Lallooji Lal. Another contemporary, Inshallah Khan, who left his native Bengal for Delhi and Lucknow, made perhaps the most unambiguous statement in support of Hindavi. It was Insha's declared intention to write an authentic (*theth*) Hindavi, abjuring both Perso-Arabic and Sanskritic excess:

जिसमें हिन्दवी छोड़ और किसी बोली का पुट न हो। बाहर की बोली और गँवारी कुछ उसके बीच में न हो। ...हिन्दवीपन भी न निकले और भाखापन भी न हो। बस जैसे भले लोग अच्छे से अच्छे आपस में बोलते-चालते हैं, ज्यों का त्यों वही सब डौल रहे और छाँह किसी का न हो...।

...in which there is no element from anything other than Hindavi. It should have nothing in it that is foreign, or rustic... It should retain its Hindaviness, but not acquire any Bhakhaness. the sort of language that the best people use amongst themselves everyday, that is what it should be like, but not appear marked in any special way...

[Preface to *Rani Ketaki ki Kahani*]

Lallooji Lal, on the other hand, is believed to have "practically newly-invented" modern Sanskritised Hindi by excising "alien" words from "the mixed Urdu language of Akbar's camp-followers

and of the market where men of all nations congregated."[8] The fact of the matter is that the pandits and munshis who were appointed found themselves coerced, possibly as much by the bureaucratic necessity of justifying their separate institutional existence as by any intrinsic characteristics of the language itself, into developing two *gradually* divergent registers, one leaning towards the Sanskrit end of the lexical spectrum, the other towards the Perso-Arabic. But the actual texts which these writers produced are, not surprisingly, mixed. As it happens, Gilchrist himself was an admirer of the "living colloquial language" which he found in common use in the course of his wanderings in North India. He was concerned about the pedantry which was threatening, *at that time*, to "disfigure ... the wonderful pliancy and copiousness of the Hindoostanee tongue" by unrestrained borrowings from Persian and Arabic. Nearly a hundred years later, arguably at least in part because of what Gilchrist did in and through Fort William, Grierson was to complain about the *Sanskritic* distortion of the people's vernacular through the invention of "one uniform artificial dialect, the mother tongue of no native-born Indian."[9]

However, the important thing that emerged from Fort William is the idea of two-ness, of linguistic duality. Fort William College gave institutional recognition to the notion that there were in fact *two* ways of doing Hindustani—one which used the available and mixed language, and another from which the Arabic-Persian words (i.e. words of 'Muslim' origin) had been removed in order to produce a language (register? idiom?) more suitable to Hindus.

Grierson is inclined to give Gilchrist the benefit of the doubt: "Gilchrist made the initial mistake of supposing that it [the Hindustani he found in use all around him] was a national language, and he attempted to restore it to what he imagined must have been its original Hindu form, by turning out all the Arabic and Persian words, and substituting Hindu ones."[10] By "Hindu" words, Grierson probably means Sanskrit-derived words, but the basic point is the familiar one about how the forms of colonial knowledge get translated into institutional practice. And in time such naive but authoritarian misunderstanding shapes an alien reality into greater correspondence with it. In David Washbrook's words: "The British ... set out to `discover' something which science told them had to be there; not surprisingly, they

"succeeded", and soon generated a vast and consequential literature of grammars, dictionaries and lexicographies."[11]

"Fort William" soon acquired a mythic status, being seen either as the visible symbol of the imperial policy of divide-and-rule, the origin and fount of linguistic division; or, alternatively, as the influential official recognition of the neglected linguistic tradition which came into its own as modern "Hindi". It is unclear from the way different people recount this history whether in their view "Fort William" merely *recognised* an existing linguistic difference and legitimised and consolidated it—or whether it *invented* such a difference. Further, is what it did—*whatever* that was—a good thing or a bad thing, i.e. should we persist along the line of linguistic fracture signalled by "Fort William", or should we seek to overcome its divisive inheritance? Obviously, the various protagonists appear to say different things at different times. It is the immediate politics of identity and difference that determines whether the claim of linguistic difference, indexed by "Fort William", is being asserted or denied, reinforced or undermined. There are points in this history when one set of antagonists emphasises identity—e.g. Sir Syed, when he travels up and down the country and discovers only one, common language, which he calls Urdu—while the other claims difference—e.g. Malaviya *et al* in the late nineteenth century. At a later point in this history, the "Urdu" side claims, and wishes to establish, difference, while the Hindi side, now dominant, denies this claim of difference and sees "Fort William" as its pernicious origin.

* * *

The other set of colonial actors who figure in this history of linguistic division (or evolution) are the missionaries who first set up shop at Serampore, near Calcutta, in the late eighteenth century. As part of their normal activities, they were soon to set up School Book societies all over north India—Calcutta, Agra, Allahabad—and embark on an ambitious publishing programme. There is no need to allege or imply conspiracy here. There were obvious technical and even existential imperatives which determined their attitudes with respect to the linguistic diversity and even anarchy of north India. Thus, the sheer technical necessity of setting up

texts in type—for the rapidly growing School Book Societies—dictated a certain "normalising" perspective. After all, standardising grammar, orthography etc. were `natural' imperatives built into the new printing technologies. Historians of Hindi grammar unambiguously trace the earliest attempts to codify Hindi—and other "native" languages—to this time.[12]

There is a further necessity which I have described as existential. When in need, even die-hard Foucauldians must reach out for the nearest available categorial boxes. And missionaries, faced with the need to order manifest disorder, must be considered particularly prone to privileging the significance of religious categories. Thus, once that first step is taken, it must appear obvious that different religious groups—persons, not yet communities—which depend upon different classical languages for their theological-spiritual heritage, must be linguistically differentiated. The sensitive historian may, with some pain, point out that these religious communities are far from given—that there is no necessary reason why all people who profess (or are born into) one religion should experience themselves as belonging to one shared community, or further that such a community should be linguistically indexed.[13] They can, they *may* if they are 'persuaded' in one way and another—but they need not. All kinds of communities, religious and secular, cut across each other, so that people belong to several communities, and potential communities, simultaneously. Privileging one kind of community over another is, always and everywhere, the exercise of a subjective, ideological preference. All this is the stuff of contemporary truisms. The missionaries of Serampore, eager to convert the godless heathen—in truth the *excessively* godful, but that is another matter!—to the one true path, chose to appeal to the people of north India in two distinct variants of the infinitely varied common tongue. One of these, aimed at Hindus, was divested of Perso-Arabic borrowings and endowed with Sanskritic substitutes; and another, aimed at Muslims, was laced with Perso-Arabic borrowings.[14] Ram Chandra Shukla, one of the creators of modern Hindi's self-consciousness, has written with approval about the missionaries' "realization" that if they wished to communicate with the common people of north India, official `Hindustani' was inadequate, and they had to approximate to the Sanskrit-near

language in which the common people told and listened to their religious stories.[15]

This was, as we now know, a deeply consequential decision, but two things need to be remarked about it at this stage: one, that as yet these linguistic-religious communities had no existence except in the proselytising designs of the missionaries. It was the attempt to make them into Christians which, in time, persuaded the benighted inhabitants of north India to become "Hindus" and "Muslims"—or perhaps more precisely, "not-Muslims" and "not-Hindus", in terms of an *implicit disaffinity* with the linguistic register which had been devised by the missionaries for the *other* community.

A related fact to be noticed in this context is that the communities envisaged by the missionaries were radically different from the more or less 'pan-Indian' cultural community that had been created through the comings and goings of the mendicants and the merchants in earlier centuries. The pre-modern community, participant in that substrate *ur*-language, or system of dialects, which we have alluded to earlier, was crucially an oral community. Unaffected by the imperatives of print-standardisation, it was a community which worked through local 'borrowings' and "neighbourly intelligibility", recognised and affirmed in flexible acts of oral communication that necessarily implicate both parties, communicator and communicatee, in the labour of finding common ground. Printed communication, on the other hand, is intrinsically fixed—and unilateral. This oral community was also, in Sudipta Kaviraj's famous description, an uncounted, fuzzy—blurry, not hard-edged— community, which had no external reason/temptation for its being.[16] It was therefore crucially different from the modern, post-census, "counted" communities. These latter communities consisted of distant strangers, often in preference to friends and neighbours, and could easily be turned to political account. But it must be stated that the modern sectarian communities which give Indian "communalism" its special meaning are still only implicit in the linguistic initiatives of the missionaries. Their full flowering required other enabling conditions.

Meanwhile, however, the story—the quest for the site of the "original offence"—goes further back, to some indeterminate but

passionately argued-over time, *before* "Fort William" and Serampore. Thus, Nathaniel Halhed, writing his Grammar of Bengal in 1778, identified a language he called 'Hindustanic' which he found in use in Bengal.[17] Halhed found two forms of this 'Hindustanic'—and one of these was "a compound idiom which was spoken by Hindus connected with Muslim courts." There was another form, however, in use by Brahmins and other well-educated Hindus "whose ambition [had] not overpowered their principles". This latter was written in Nagari characters and was "pure"—i.e. it abjured the use of 'exotic' words introduced by the Muslims and in turn "introduced more and more abstruse terms from Sanskrit." Halhed's own prejudice in favour of the pure and classically derived form as against the current and "compound idiom" was one that he shared with colonial grammarians and indeed with native pedagogues.

But while one may be justified in reading great *consequence* into the well-meaning efforts of the Serampore missionaries and the colonial grammarians, or into the bureaucratic difference between "Muslim" Hindustani and "Hindu" Hindustani institutionalised at Fort William, it is clearly absurd to read any great *design* into it. There is ample evidence of different lines of thought on the part of the early-colonial administrators who were faced with the task of making sense of the surrounding linguistic diversity. The practical necessity of running the colonial administration, and the pedagogical necessity of training civil servants for it, dictated that their attitude to the given diversity had to be activist and masterful, rather than laid-back and tolerant. They were, by definition, not native-born, and were consequently unable to navigate these waters with the ease that comes as naturally to Indians today as it must have come then—making sense of widely different accents, dialectally different vocabularies, which have to be coaxed towards some common, consensual zone. Native speakers typically don't need grammars. And as one native informant incredulously asked his sahib lexicographer, "was it ever yet known in any country that men had to consult vocabularies and rudiments for their own vernacular speech..."[18] In time, of course, this "vernacular" would be rendered so alien that no "vocabularies and rudiments" would suffice to save large numbers

of native speakers of Hindi from failing in "Hindi" at the school final examinations. But that is a later story.

* * *

The actual process, magnanimously decreed by the Board of Directors of the East India Company, of replacing Persian—the language of Mughal administration—with the local vernaculars, shows considerable local variation. Thus, the history of modern Bengali, or modern Marathi, or modern Tamil, must all recognize the replacement of Persian (in 1832 in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, in 1837 in the Bengal Presidency, with the exception of Bihar, which was then a part of the Bengal Presidency) as a crucial moment. But their subsequent histories were subject to the specific cultural and demographic topographies of those regions.

In much of north India, too, where "Hindustani" in the Persian script was officially designated as the local vernacular, there was considerable regional variation in the manner in which the change could actually be effected. One of the sticking points, then and later, concerned the exact form of "Hindustani" itself. Obviously, in so far as the name identified a zone on a continuum, the privileged interpretation could easily be coaxed towards the dominant Persianate pole. Indeed, it was averred by the protagonists of Nagari, that the mere fact of using the Persian script *itself* exerted a bias in favour of a Persianised language—also because many of the sounds of the real vernacular could not be reproduced in the Persian script. Thus, the question of the script was, if initially only by implication but perhaps always, a question regarding the acceptable form of the language too.

In Bihar and in the Central Provinces (now M.P.), Hindustani in the Persian script began to be replaced by Hindi in the Nagari script in the 1870s and 1880s, while in the Punjab, Urdu (or Hindustani) and the Persian script retained their dominance until well into the twentieth century. But the area which is most crucial for our purpose of understanding the emergence of modern Hindi, is that of the NWP&O (i.e. roughly, modern U.P.). It is here that the resistance was strongest, the struggle most intense, the cultural consequences most profound. Bihar and C.P. are important only in so far as they give one a perspective on this struggle in what was to become the Hindi heartland.

In the 'Saugor and Nerbudda Territories' (later C.P., now M.P.), a particularly conscientious official called Frederick Shore gave the Nagari script its first official break. The Board had authorised the replacement of Persian by the vernacular, but Shore himself took the initiative in pressing for the substitution of the Persian script as well. (On this crucial matter of the script, the directive was silent.) Shore argued that before the introduction of British rule, the people of these parts had conducted all their official business in Nagari anyway, and the introduction of Persian under British aegis had brought "a set of harpies from the [North Western] Provinces" who had taken over the administration and introduced the Persian script and the Persianised Hindustani with which they were familiar.

The reversion, however, was not easily effected. For some time after the use of Nagari had been allowed, the "harpies" continued to use the Persian script, and even after they were compelled by a vigilant Shore to use the Nagari script, they maintained the necessary opacity of administrative business by Persianising the language to such an extent that it bore little resemblance to the people's vernacular. The official pressure against this "Persianisation" was maintained, but the vested interest in maintaining an administrative monopoly through the knowledge of a particular idiom (if not, also, a particular script) was not easily dislodged.

The story of the introduction of the Nagari script and the Hindi language (i.e. an un-Persianised version of the vernacular) is, therefore characterized by numerous reversals. When the C.P. were carved out of the "Saugor and Nerbudda Territories" in 1861, it was discovered that a Persianised language and script continued to be in use. However, this practice could not call upon the support of any powerful local constituency and, in the event, the Nagari script came into use in these parts significantly earlier than it did in the NWP&O.[19] The mistaken introduction of Persian by the annexing British was not allowed to persist for very long, and Nagari was able to resume an official status which it had been temporarily denied. This is crucially different from the NWP&O where, of course, Persian had been the language/script of administration for as long as anyone could remember. Here, a powerful and historically well-established class was already present and ready to resist any change in the traditional

dispensation. (The Bihar case—alluded to briefly above—was roughly midway between the C.P. and N.W.P. ones—i.e. there was some resistance, but not enough to become significant.)

The social composition of the linguistic constituencies in NWP was significantly different from both C.P. and Bihar—partly at any rate as a consequence of the nature and reach of *education* in the region.[20] Hindsight may make it look like conspiracy, but it is far more likely that colonial educational policy in the NWP during the nineteenth century was simply inconsistent and confused—a not unknown characteristic of policy before and since. Indigenous schools which offered instruction in Persian, Arabic, Hindi and Sanskrit were in existence even before the British came. And it is possible to see a latent but potentially explosive pattern of differentiation in the different constituencies which were catered to by these schools. In one district, Agra, the Hindi schools (128) outnumbered all the others put together: Persian (85), Sanskrit (6), Arabic (1). The Hindi schools served mainly rural constituencies of Brahmins, Baniyas and Rajputs—Hindu-*savarna*—whose students aspired to modest local positions. The teachers in these schools were mainly Brahmins. The Persian schools, on the other hand, were mainly urban in their orientation. Here the teachers were largely Muslim, and the students—mainly Hindu-Kayastha and Muslim—expected to have careers in government service. And while it is likely that the nominal devaluation of Persian in the administration after 1837 might have made a difference to this pattern, the hyper-Persianisation of official Urdu/Hindustani, *and* the retention of the Persian script, contained its consequence. This pattern, of one set of schools where Muslims and Hindu-Kayasthas were educated for careers in government, and another, more modest one for the Hindu-savarna, mainly Brahmin, was repeated across the state.

Indeed, this same pattern of differentiation was to be found in the schools which were set up by the Government also: there was an Urdu (Persian) stream and a Hindi (Sanskrit) stream. On the basis of careful statistical examination of the data, King has pointed out several interesting correlations. Thus he identifies "...a definite correlation between urban residence and the study of Islamic-heritage languages on the one hand, and rural residence and the study of Hindu-heritage languages on the other."

As one went higher up the educational ladder, from the village schools up to the urban colleges, the number of those studying Hindi dropped steadily, while the number of those studying Urdu (Persian) and later English rose steadily. One other profoundly consequential fact that emerges from these statistics is that there was an uneven regional pattern in the language studied. Thus, while Urdu (Persian) was dominant in Oudh and the western districts of NWP, in the central and eastern districts of NWP, very large majorities studied Hindi—and then Sanskritized "Hindi". Not surprisingly, then, the two major centres of Hindi agitation which gathered force in the latter half of the nineteenth century were Allahabad (central NWP) and Banaras (eastern NWP).

Concern regarding the widening gulf between Hindi and Urdu—indeed, the emergence of "Hindi" and "Urdu" from the common language that was Hindi-and-Urdu—began to be voiced from very early on. Isolated examples of proto-varieties of both "Urdu" and "Hindi" may of course be found as early as in the eighteenth century.[21] But the depth and reach of the pattern of differentiation that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century—ramifying beyond language into culture and community and finally "nation"—is something that needs to be understood in its modern specificity.

With the expansion of education after 1857, there was a great increase in the need for text-books. The task of creating these naturally devolved on the *pandits* and *maulvis* who taught in these schools. Their traditional disrespect for the vernacular—remarked by Gilchrist[22], and the great nineteenth century lexicographer Fallon[23], among others—made the pedants naturally reach into the classical heritages with which they were familiar. Writing in 1876, J.C. Nesfield, then Director of Public Instruction in Oudh, remarked: "The antagonism of maulvis and pandits, each endeavouring to supersede the vernacular currency with words coined from their respective mints has, no doubt, done much to widen the breach between Urdu and Hindi, and to give rise to the false impression that they are two different languages."[24]

In 1880, C.J.Lyall described the efforts of the pandits to create a High Hindi freed of Persian words as "a foolish purism and a political mistake".[25] R.T.H. Griffith, who was the Director of Public Instruction in NWP&O, wrote to the Secretary on 2 February 1884

reassuring him that "a new set of Hindi—or rather Hindustani—readers" had been prepared under his supervision, which would *not* be open to the objections urged against the old readers: "pedantic, childish, pretentious, inane, bad in point of idiom and language." However, he feared, *in 1884*, that "some Hindi purists will probably say that the language is not Hindi at all".[26] Lala Sita Ram B.A. too noticed these busy Brahmins, and complained in a letter to the Hindi Sub-Committee on 6 October 1902: "Pedantry widens the gulf [between Hindi and Urdu], but it is the mischievous folly of some Hindi writers, who make up for their want of command over the vernacular by unnecessary importation of Sanskrit words, that is most to blame..."[27] Harcourt Butler, the Lt.Gov. who succeeded MacDonnell, even complained to his mother (!) that his Text-book Committee was "under the influence of the ultra-Hindu section who are now writing primary text books in sanskritised Hindi which the people cannot understand."[28] Ironically enough, the first President of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Lakshmi Shankar Misra, wrote to the Provincial Text Book Committee in 1902, arguing than "an attempt should be made to assimilate the two forms [Urdu and Hindi] into one language, which may be called Hindustani, and may be written either in the Persian or the Nagari character."[29] Not surprisingly, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha soon found another President!

It was in the Text Book Committees that the struggle for a *common* language was really joined, and finally lost. The U.P. Education Report of 1915-6 records that the Committee on Primary Education eventually endorsed the recommendation made by its predecessor, the Rural Education Committee of 1910, that "primary text books of the upper level at least should include passages in distinctive Hindi and Urdu. This time the Government did not intervene."[30]

* * *

The incongruity of having two parallel educational streams was brought to a tragic pitch because the colonial administrative apparatus, the greatest employer by far, was all but closed for the purpose of employment to people graduating from the Nagari stream. As indicated above, these proportionately more rural students were expected to aspire to "modest local positions", often

in education—thereby compounding the problem. In 1877, almost as a perverse response to the gathering movement for the recognition of Nagari/Hindi, a knowledge of *Urdu* was made a compulsory requirement for all official employment offering more than Rs10/- per month! The material necessity, indeed, the material *desperation*, created by the inconsistency between the educational policy of the government and its employment policy—the compulsory Urdu requirement was withdrawn only in 1896—is an ineluctable part of any explanation of the politics of linguistic difference in late nineteenth century North India. The unemployment among the educated classes is a recurrent theme in the writings of Bharatendu and his contemporaries. One of them wrote a poem—dated, interestingly, 6 A.H., Anno Harishchandra, i.e. 1891—which captures this mood of being boxed in:

लैसन इंकम चुन्गी चन्दा पुलिस अदालत बरसा घाम।
सब के हाथन असन बसन जीवन संसयमय रहत मुदाम।
जो इनहू ते प्रान बचे तो गोलि बोलति आय धड़ाम।
मृत्यु देवता नमस्कार तुम सब प्रकार बस तृप्यन्ताम।।[31]

By many things is one's life beset—
By licences and income tax, by octroi, and by this and that—
By the police and the lawcourts, by the rain and the sun.
And if perchance one these escapes, there's the awful sound of the gun.
Welcome then O god of death, be satisfied for I am done.

Without this mismatch between input and output, as it were, the merely linguistic and stylistic differences that may be traced to Serampore and Fort William, between Persian-influenced or Sanskrit- and Braj-influenced variants—or even beyond, to the decadent Mughal nobility and even to sundry translators of Hindu religious texts,—might well not have had the poisonous effectivity which they soon acquired. The rough beast of cultural differentiation—of amputation and self-mutilation, leading eventually to civil war and partition—was formed in the parallel nurseries which were the innocent and certainly unintended consequence of colonial education policy. But the vernacular controversy—as it was then called—or the Nagari/Hindi agitation—only really got under way in NWP&O. It finally became

irresistible, when colonial educational policy—and certain other factors, such as the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the traders and merchants in the small towns[32]—had created an elite that could drive the politics which linguistic differentiation had rendered both possible and then, unavoidable.

* * *

The defining—if largely unacknowledged—event for the latter half of the nineteenth century, at least in north India; was the uprising of 1857, carefully belittled in colonial historiography as the Sepoy Mutiny. Ram Bilas Sharma's influential 1977 work, *Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi aur Hindi Navajagaran*, starts with a ringing declaration: "The Renaissance in the Hindi region started with the freedom struggle of 1857." On Sharma's account, there is a seamless transition from the popular, democratic and anti-colonial ideas expressed in several of the proclamations issued by the rebels of 1857 and the consciousness that finds expression in the writings of Bharatendu and his contemporaries. Further, he sees a linear development from the Bharatendu *yuga* to the nationalist and modernist restlessness which characterises the writers associated with Dwivedi and his influential journal, *Saraswati*. It is a pleasant and superficially plausible thesis, but there are some problems with it. The ideological motivations of the rebels of 1857 were a mixture of popular-democratic and feudal elements. This is hardly surprising, and Sharma makes a powerful case for redeeming the rebels of 1857 from the calumny of a historical appraisal that is guided mainly by colonial perceptions. But the generation that followed the trauma of 1857 had a rather ambivalent relationship to its legacy. No doubt there were powerful reasons why this legacy could not be avowed openly. Still, one cannot help noticing that it is only after some decades have passed that 1857 can even be remembered. In his pioneering study of one aspect of the Nagari/Hindi movement, Shitikant Misra remarks *en passant* that 1857 does *not* find a place in the writings of Bharatendu Harishchandra and his contemporaries.[33]

And while the rebels of 1857 could not be avowed, some sort of *modus vivendi* had to be worked out with the colonial regime that was established after the cataclysm. The resultant

consciousness is one that is tense with internal contradiction, tense with the need to formulate a "nationalist" consciousness in a terroristic colonial context. Bharatendu's career is in some sense a poignant demonstration of this tension: the free consciousness, eager to assume responsibility for its world, is periodically brought to heel, forced to accommodate itself to the realities of colonial power, forced to remain silent. *Pace* Sharma, I would argue that it is this *tension* that determines the evolution of Bharatendu and his contemporaries as well as his successors. It is this that accounts, *mutatis mutandis*, for the fact that the movement for Hindi which unquestionably has democratic and modernist elements in it, particularly in the early phase, acquires in time, conservative and even reactionary characteristics. 1857 *is* a watershed, but the politics—including the cultural politics—that develops on this side of the watershed is one that is marked by the moment of liberation as well as by the repression. Rather than thinking of '1857' as a *threshold* or platform from which was launched the project of an Indian nationalist modernity, I am inclined to think of it as an *abyss*. The politics that happened on this side of the abyss was influenced as much by the abyss and the resultant power vacuum, as it was by the rebels' proclamations and even, in a more complex fashion, by the memories of the world before the trauma.

* * *

The Hunter Commission observed coolly in 1884: "The disasters of 1857 also reduced some of the best families to indigence, and this gave a stimulus to individual exertion and personal merit."[34] There is a wealth of social history concentrated in that remark. On the one side, there was the anxiety of the pre-1857 ruling elite, i.e. Francis Robinson's Avadhi "Urdu-speaking elite".* This elite

* "..this dominant class, mainly of landlords and government servants...[This composite elite consisting of Muslims and Hindus] may be defined as a group, almost a class, by their adherence to a government-bred culture, the culture of those whole lives revolved around government service and the towns... It should be clear that Muslim government servants and landlords were just a part, though a large part, of this elite, and that their connections with Hindus who belonged to this elite were far stronger than their connections with Muslims who did not, such as the butchers of the towns or the bigoted weavers of the villages." [Robinson, 1993, 31-2].

could see the quickening erosion of its traditional dominance, endangered as much by the spectre of Nagari/Hindi as it was by the new-fangled notion of holding competitive examinations for official employment. According to Robinson, "The reaction of the Commissioner of Rohilkhand to the suggestion that educational requirements for official employment should be raised was typical: 'The best men, and the Muhammadan employees in particular will not survive the test. Sharp Kayasth lads will come to the front, while more reliable and steady men will be passed over.'"[35]

But equally clearly, on the other side, there was the hunger (and the greed) of the new Nagari/Hindi proto-elite which saw in the declining fortunes of the Avadh elite, saw even in the *hiatus* caused by the repressions following 1857, its own historic opportunity. David Lelyveld summarises the process thus: "From the point of view of a man like Syed Ahmad in 1870, there was good reason to believe that the day was coming when the established forms of a *sharif* upbringing would no longer qualify a man for participation in the life and benefits of *kachahri* society. Widespread British antagonism to Muslims as the authors of the 1857 revolt, popular Indian dissatisfaction with the `amlah class' as exploitative, efforts to encourage English educational prerequisites for office, and finally, a new kind of organised political campaign for Hindi as the language of the courts—all this threatened those Muslim families that had an interest in getting official employment for their sons."[36]

In sum, the disastrous (and no doubt glorious) uprising of 1857—*and* the brutal reprisals that followed its suppression—had brought the Muslim feudal nobility that had played such an important part in it, under suspicion, and although a disproportionate number of Muslims continued to be in official employment,[37] Muslims felt that they were being discriminated against.[38] Thus, we hear Ghalib complain in post-1857 Delhi, that people are reluctant to give employment to Muslims.[39] And one may well see Sir Syed as someone who sought assiduously to redeem the Muslim community from the "stigma" of disloyalty, and to prepare it through education etc. to avail of the benefits of colonial rule.

However, the Hindu *savarna*—Brahmins, Banias and Khattris[40]—who formed the bulk of the early Nagari/Hindi

agitations, sought energetically, on their part, to distinguish themselves from the Muslims who had been so unforgivably disloyal in 1857. When Raja Shiva Prasad petitioned the Government on behalf of Nagari in 1868, he made it only too clear that he was speaking on behalf of a Hindu middle class. And these people, he sought to assure the Government, would be happy to accept the domination of the "fair-complexioned": "Never will it be safe to leave any district without a fair-complexioned head. It is not the excess but rather the dearth of the fair-complexioned that we have to complain of."[41] Raja Shiva Prasad was, of course, too obsequious even for contemporary tastes—it appears that he was hanged, in effigy, at one of the early Congress sessions![42] His 1868 Memorandum spills way beyond his ostensible intention of recommending Nagari, and becomes a general diatribe against the script, the language and then the people—unreliable "Muhammadans" : "I am not one of those alarmists who think that day not far distant, when the hordes of the tartars may be brought again, as in the days of yore, to the banks of the Indus... yet it cannot be denied that the eyes of Muhammadan India are now turned towards Peshawar, and the people who count in their ranks butchers fattened on the plunder of the Commissariat, supplying money to the frontier rebels, no one can say what mischief they may not do in times of trouble."[43]* Even Sir Syed is deemed insufficiently loyal by the rampant Shiva Prasad: "A man who denies the benefit of British rule in India, is not only blind to the interests of his fellow-countrymen, but disloyal to the State."

Another early-Hindi protagonist, Balakrishna Bhatt, pleaded that Hindus had been taught by their ancient religious texts to consider all kings (and presumably queens) to be divinities incarnate.[45] This is written in December 1899—maximal pressure on MacDonnell!—and Bhatt wonders why the British are taking so long to recognise the natural loyalism of his community: after all, he writes, even Akbar recognised it! Later Hindi protagonists are of course eager, post facto, to assume the mantle of anti-

*As late as 1918, Harcourt Butler, the Governor of U.P. reported that Malaviya came to visit him and suggested that the Muslims might attempt to reconquer India from the British! (Butler Papers).[44]

colonialism. Thus, one historian of this movement describes the early Nagari/Hindi agitations as *sahasa pradarshan*—manifestations of courage—but even here the truth comes out soon enough: "...the government was generously inclined towards the Hindus..."[46]

The opponents of Nagari/Hindi were of course eager, in this awe-inspired milieu of *competitive* loyalism, to point out the subversive potential of these mobilisations, eager to warn the colonial authorities about the connections between the language/script agitation, the cow protection movement, and the emergent Congress Party. On 18 June 1900, the Urdu periodical *Al-Bashir* counselled the authorities: "The Hindi-Urdu controversy, the cow-protection societies, and the system of competitive examination (for official appointments), though they apparently seem to be directed against Muslims, are really appendages of the National Congress, and indirectly breathe a spirit into the country which cannot possibly be beneficial to the British Government."[47]

The Nagari/Hindi protagonists were, however, equally keen to disavow any suspicion of "disloyalty". Pratap Narain Misra's grotesquely obsequious poem in praise of Queen Victoria -

पूरी अमी की कटोरिया सी चिरंजीवी रहो विक्टोरिया रानी...[48]
Little cup of nectar,
Queen Victor-
ia, may you live forever...

is one of many possible examples. In his 'Criticism' of the Hindi Reader No.3 of 1899, Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi wrote:

इस पुस्तक को हमने साद्यान्त पढ़ा परन्तु इसमें ऐसा कोई पाठ हमको नहीं मिला जिसमें अँग्रेज़ी राज्य की प्रशंसा अथवा कथा होती। नादिरशाह का वृत्तान्त है, भारतेश्वरी विक्टोरिया का नहीं। बाबर की कथा बड़े प्रेम से वर्णन की गयी है, किसी वाइसरॉय की नहीं। जिसके राज्य में हम सुख से शयन करते हैं, जिसके राज्य में हिन्दी पाठशालाएँ नियत हुई हैं, और जिसके राज्य में आज किताबें लिखने का सौभाग्य हमको प्राप्त हुआ है, उसका अथवा उसके किसी प्रतिनिधि का परिचय लड़कों को दिलाना क्या कोई अनुचित बात थी?[49]
I read this book from cover to cover, but found no lesson here in which there was some praise of English rule. There is an account

of Nadirshah, but none of Victoria, Empress of India. The story of Babar has been told in great detail, but not of any Viceroy. Would it have been so improper to have familiarised students with the State and the people under whose rule we live peacefully, under which Hindi schools have been opened, and where we have the good fortune to be writing books?

One Swami Alarama, who used folk forms—*ghanakshari, lavani, doha*—to carry the message of the Congress—*Kaangres Pukaar Manjari*—in 1892, illustrates well the combination of the excitement of colonial modernity with the hope of imminent participation therein which motivated Malaviya and his colleagues in the early Nagari/Hindi struggle. He hopes to make ordinary people understand the real intent —अभिप्राय—of the Congress so that they are reinforced in their loyalty—राजभक्ति—and become complete well-wishers—पूरे शुभ-चिंतक—of the Government. Here is a sample of his verse:

विदित हो कि श्रीमती विक्टोरिया जबसे इन्डिया राज लिया।
नगर-नगर में बने कालिज बजा नकारा विद्या का।
दोय मास का गैल जो था वा रेल से हो गया एक दिन का।
जहाँ ख़बर जा एक साल में, वहाँ तार एक छिन में जा।।[50]

Be it known by one and all that ever since Mrs Victoria took over India Raj,
There are colleges in every town, and knowledge is everywhere
The journey that used to take two months, can now be completed in but one day
And news that took a whole year to arrive now gets there in just a second...

It is unsurprising, then, that the flurry of activity in support of Nagari/Hindi in NWP&O starts surprisingly soon after 1857—before the blood spilt by the avenging British has quite dried, so to speak.* The Banaras Institute was founded in 1861 and the Allahabad Institute some years later. These bodies consisted mainly of educated Hindu professionals who began to raise the question

*Cp Ram Chandra Shukla 1929, p.232:
1857 के बलवे के पीछे ही हिंदी गद्य साहित्य की परम्परा अच्छी तरह चली।
Hindi prose literature came into its own really only after the affray of 1857.

of the regional vernacular—Urdu or Hindi?—and the appropriate script for it. A contemporary observer, Garcin de Tassy, reports that even in the early days, this was a matter of great dispute between Hindus and Muslims.[51] Hali writes that very soon a whole range of associations was set up across the province, and that the working of these associations was coordinated by the Allahabad Institute.[52]

As it happens, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was posted as a Magistrate in Banaras in the 1860s. His biographer, Hali, reports that Sir Syed was deeply alarmed at the tone of the controversy and used to say, in later years, that he had realised, *then*, that Hindus and Muslims would not, henceforth, be able to unite on a common platform and work for common ends. It was during these days, Sir Syed recalled, that he had gone to call on one Mr Shakespeare, who was the Commissioner of Banaras. He had gone to talk to him about taking steps to improve the educational condition of Muslims, but Mr Shakespeare heard him out with considerable surprise. He remarked that this was the first time that he had heard Sir Syed talk about advancing the interests of Muslims, rather than those of all Indians. Sir Syed's dark prophecy might not have been self-fulfilling, but fulfilled it certainly was: with so-called educated people pitching in (जो तालिम-याफ़्ता कहलाते हैं), he predicted rising tensions between the two communities. This is merely the beginning, he said, he who lives shall see [dire outcomes].[53]

* * *

In 1868 Babu, and later Raja Shiva Prasad, who was a prominent official in the Education Department submitted the memorandum to the Government *a propos* the official language which we have already encountered in another context. Shiva Prasad's argument was directed specifically against the Persian script—not against Persianised Urdu, which he himself used with considerable ability. But the terms in which he couched his argument foreshadow clearly the more radical communalising developments which were soon to follow. Thus, he spoke about how the prevalent official script "thrusts a Semitic element into the bosoms of Hindus and alienates them from their Aryan speech; not only speech, but all

that is Aryan.... To read Persian is to become Persianised, all our ideas become corrupt and our nationality is lost. Cursed be the day which saw the Muhammadans cross the Indus; all the evils which we find amongst us we are indebted for to our 'beloved brethren' the Muhammadans..."[54]

The Government promised to think about the matter—i.e. decided to do nothing about it. And Shiva Prasad blamed his fellow Hindi protagonists, who did not keep their agitation narrowly focussed on the matter of the script, and thereby made the demand, for the time being, unconcedable. The Raja complained, years later:

> I would have won the battle, though I had all the Muhammadan official world arrayed against me, but I have now to cry out "Save me from my friends!" My friends, my countrymen, the foolish Hindus, made it a question of Hindi and Urdu language, and left the question of characters quite aside. They proclaimed a crusade against all the Persian words which have become our household words and which are now used by all our women, children, and the rustic population, as well as the urban. They wanted to use unintelligible and difficult Sanskrit words...[55]

Another memorial in favour of Hindi—script, but also a de-Persianised Hindustani—was submitted to the Lt. Governor Sir William Muir in 1873. In this, once again, the familiar arguments were repeated: the Urdu script was ambiguous, often illegible, and encouraged clerical mischief; it conduced towards the employment of an artificially Persianised idiom; that Hindi users were overwhelmingly more numerous than the elites who had a vested interest in the prevalent dispensation; that Hindi was already in use in Bihar, C.P. and the hill districts of the NWP, without causing any difficulty.

Once again, the Government did nothing in the matter. And in 1877, it issued an order which added insult to injury, or vice versa, by requiring all aspirants to Government appointments with emoluments greater than Rs10/- per month to have proficiency in Urdu! There was, as it happens, no great public outcry about this, but there are indications in the vernacular press that the matter, not surprisingly, continued to agitate Nagari/Hindi protagonists. The order was finally withdrawn in 1896, but the harvest of bitterness that it produced was being gathered for a long time to come. The mixture of policy and apathy deployed by the

Government had a powerful effect not only on the outcome of the script/language controversy, but even, I would argue, on the "Hindi" that was formed in the course of such a bitter and prolonged struggle.

Hope revived once again in 1882, when the Government formed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir William Hunter, to review the progress of education in India. It was believed by the Nagari/Hindi protagonists at any rate that the Commission had the power to recommend changes in the language policy of the Government. Many prominent witnesses deposed before the Commission, among them Raja Shiva Prasad, Bharatendu Harishchandra, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. There was a massive campaign of mobilization by the Nagari/Hindi supporters to influence the outcome. 76 memorials were submitted to the Commission in support of Nagari/Hindi. They were all identical, though they purported to come from all over the Province, and comprised a total of 58,289 signatures.

The arguments that were made before the Commission were by now well-worn: on the one side, that the Persian script was critically ambiguous, that Urdu was in any case unfamiliar to the vast majority of the population, and was the means whereby a certain class of people maintained its stranglehold on the administration. On the other side, it was urged that Urdu was the language of civility and of the better class of people, and that Hindi was merely "the shifting vulgar speech used by the rude villagers." Bharatendu Harishchandra's testimony offers a glimpse of the complex politics that was at stake. He declared his bonafides to comment on these matters thus: "I have always taken an interest in education. I am a Sanskrit, Hindi, and Urdu poet..." He testifies at one point: "I am sorry to learn that the Hon. Sayyid Ahmad Khan Bahadur, C.S.I., in his evidence before the Education Commission, says that Urdu is the language of the gentry and Hindi that of the vulgar. The statement is not only incorrect, but unjust to the Hindus." There is the familiar argument that "if Urdu ceases to be the court language, the Mussulmans will not easily secure the numerous offices of Government ... of which at present they have a sort of monopoly." But, he says, there is also "a secret motive which induces the worshippers of Urdu to devote themselves to its cause. It is the language of dancing girls and

prostitutes. The depraved sons of wealthy Hindus and youths of substance and loose character, when in the society of harlots, concubines, and pimps, speak Urdu..." The intemperate tone is deeply significant.

In the event, however, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who was a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, persuaded the Hunter Commission that the matter of Nagari/Hindi/Urdu had nothing to do with education: it was, he argued, in fact a grave *political* matter and the officials of the Government were well aware of its implications.[56] Hunter got the message, and kept scrupulously off the subject. And there the matter rested—smouldered, glowered, releasing its bitter poison—for the time being. In the words of a contemporary bard:

हन्टर ने जो हन्टर मारा।
बस टूट गया दिल टुकड़े हुआ हमारा।।[57]
The cruel lash of Hunter's hunter
Broke our patience, broke our hearts.

Less plaintively, a Banaras Hindi weekly warned: "If the Government does not listen we must cry out so loudly that the sound reaches its ear."[58] Well, they did, and it did.

* * *

There had been a massive mobilisation by the Hindi side in order to influence the Commission, and it is likely that the immediate failure of the Nagari/Hindi initiative, and the apparent lull in the campaign, is deceptive. Because the fortuitous appointment of a sympathetic Lt Governor, Sir Anthony MacDonnell, in 1895, revived the Nagari/Hindi campaign in a dramatic fashion.

Delegations waited on MacDonnell. There was a huge revival of interest in the vernacular press. Eminent and articulate citizens sought to persuade MacDonnell of something with which he was, as we have seen, inclined to concur anyway. The crowning act of this process of democratic mobilisation and lobbying was the meeting of the delegation of 17 eminent citizens, under the leadership of Madan Mohan Malaviya, with MacDonnell at the Government House in Allahabad on 2 March 1898. It was a Thursday: the time of the meeting, high noon.[59]

The deputationists' arguments were received sympathetically by MacDonnell. However, he warned about the danger of antagonising the powerful vested interests which would rise in defence of the status quo. This was, after all, the anxiety that had killed all earlier thoughts of reform. In 1871, the Secretary NWP&O wrote to the Chief Commissioner, Oudh: "It would be "very hazardous for the Government to support Hindi against Urdu, for there was "political danger" involved in the disaffection of a class of men about whom the complaint already was that their means of living were too scanty. The Mahomedans in fact would be ousted from public employ."[60] There was an obvious democratic argument in favour of reform, but a colonial government necessarily had an ambivalent attitude to destabilising the traditional equilibrium in favour of democratic challenges thereto.

The decades of memorialising and lobbying had found a fitting culmination in the *Memorandum* which Malaviya presented to MacDonnell—the "Court Character and Primary Education in NWP&O" (1897). This is without doubt a masterly document. It is an efficient compilation of the prehistory—arguments as well as documents—of the controversy. Malaviya was a lawyer, and the *Memorandum is* a slanted, *lawyerly* document. But it also demonstrates unmistakably the intellectual ability as well as the political savvy of the emergent Nagari/Hindi proto-elite. It was now more than ready to take on the dinosaurs of the Avadh elite—and Malaviya's Memorandum as well as MacDonnell's incumbency made the decisive difference.

The contradiction in British policy—allowing and even aiding education in Nagari/Hindi while closing off all the avenues of employment in the administration—was one which was pointed out by others before Malaviya. It was argued, for instance, that if Nagari/Hindi was not fit to be recognised officially, then the government should not permit people to be educated in it. Malaviya rehearsed all the familiar arguments in favour of the official acceptance of Nagari/Hindi: the irreducible and mischief-prone ambiguity of the Persian-Urdu script; its apparently irresistible slide into pompous obscurity; the fact that Nagari/Hindi would allow a more transparent relation between the people and the administration than obtained at present—mediated as it was by a class of (deceitful) natives, mainly Muslims and

Kayasthas, who alone knew the obscure language that was equally alien to the rulers and the ruled...

Malaviya's *Memorandum* was brilliant in that he *reformulated* the controversy in such a way that an enlightened concern with the laggard condition of primary education in the State now appeared to be the main focus. The argument was simple enough: if the products of a particular stream of education were stubbornly barred from a major avenue of employment, it was bound to be devalued. He marshalled statistics to demonstrate the deleterious effect of the aforementioned 1877 order—requiring Urdu for official employment paying above Rs10/- p.m. Malaviya's argument was that the Government had introduced a bias in favour of Urdu education. But the *crucial* move was to argue, further, that the real casualty of that policy was not the Nagari/Hindi student—that would have been too obvious. Rather that given the inherent superiority of the Nagari script for the purposes of primary education, the growth of primary education *itself* was being adversely affected!

Malaviya's argument, then, based itself not on manifest self-interest, but on the undeniable backwardness of the region, and its laggard education. It was easy to move from there to the region's proneness to crime, superstition and fanaticism. Malaviya quoted Victor Hugo—"He who opens a school, closes a prison"—and Adam Smith, via Macaulay—"The education of the poor...is a matter which deeply concerns the commonwealth. Just as the Magistrate ought to interfere for the purpose of preventing the leprosy from spreading among the people, he ought to interfere for the purpose of stopping the progress of the moral distempers which are inseparable from ignorance. Nor can this duty be neglected without danger to the public peace. If you leave the multitude uninstructed there is serious risk that religious animosities may produce the most dreadful disorders." Macaulay is quoted as referring darkly to the "No Popery" riots of "1870".* Malaviya concluded thus: "... the ignorance of the common people makes the property, the limbs, the lives of all classes insecure. Without the shadow of a grievance, at the summons of a madman,

*...An obvious mistake—the allusion is to the Gordon Riots of 1780 which formed the background of Dickens's novel, *Barnaby Rudge*.

a hundred thousand people rise in insurrection..." And just in case this was an insufficient trigger for arousing the memories of 1857 in a sympathetic MacDonnell, Malaviya glossed it: "Even the recent history of these Provinces affords many a painful instance of a like character."

It is important to note, in fairness, that in the particular matter of language, Malaviya is making an enlightened and democratic claim, and not an arrogant, Sanskritic, high-cultural one: "...no change of language is advocated ... since the Government orders already in force, albeit unenforced, say all that needs to be said about using the language of the people" (p.62). He is at pains to argue about the need to empower the people's vernacular, and to point out the educational and related advantages—less crime, more female education—that can be expected to flow from it. His attitude towards the vexed question of lexicon—excessive borrowings from the Perso-Arabic and Sanskrit streams—is catholic and moderate. He cites Raja Shiva Prasad to the effect that the legitimate claim for the Nagari script had become vitiated by the demand for a separate language purified of "alien" borrowings.

On 18 April 1900, a little over two years after Malviya and company called on MacDonnell in Allahabad, 67 years after the Board started the process of vernacularising the colonial administration, a full century after the establishment of Fort William College where, arguably for the first time, the idea of two separate languages was first mooted, MacDonnell initiated the fateful order allowing the permissive but not exclusive use of the Nagari character in the courts of NWP. He pointed out, incidentally, that unlike in the C.P. and Bihar, "the question does not admit of [an] easy solution". He also stated explicitly that he was *"not disposed to raise the question of language as distinct from that of character."*. For all that, it was, as they say, a famous victory.*

*A widely misunderstood phrase:
'But what good came of it at last?'
Quoth little Peterkin.
'Why that I cannot tell', said he,
'But 'twas a famous victory.'

[Southey, "The Battle of Blenheim"]

MacDonnell's order was widely and enthusiastically welcomed by the protagonists of Nagari/Hindi. Shridhar Pathak expressed their gratitude in a poem:

हानि असन्ख्यन होत है नित उर्दू करतूत।
श्री म्यकडानेल जानि यह कियो बात अनुभूत।।[61]
Knowing the endless harms that Urdu caused
'Twas a wise thing MacDonnell did.

The Editor of *Bharat Jiwan*, on 13 April 1900, expressed the hope that the "Government having done its part, the people will now entirely refrain from the use of the ambiguous Persian character."[62]

The order was, predictably and almost as widely, bitterly criticised. MacDonnell was perceived as being excessively sympathetic to the Nagari/Hindi cause—an impression which might have been reinforced by the fact that his long-awaited order was, in fact, *anticipated* by the *Devanagari Gazette* on 25 October 1899![63]* We have already seen how Sir Syed warned of the ominous consequences that would flow from the movement whose beginnings he had witnessed in Banaras in the 1860s. The *Punjab Observer* of 4 July 1900, taking cognisance of MacDonnell's momentous decision, also warned: "We cannot but characterise it as anything short of a grave political blunder, and history written a hundred years later will have to mourn the mistake made in 1900."[64] The *Punjab Observer* was, as it happens, concerned about the likely "harm to imperial interests" because of the anticipated hostility of the powerful Avadh elite, but the generations that are the inheritors of the divided legacy of the subcontinent, as indeed we who are doing this history almost exactly 100 years later, are well within our rights to have different ideas about what exactly we are "mourning".

Meanwhile, on the Persian/Urdu side, there was the predictable flurry of mobilisations in defence of Urdu. The *Punjab*

*Readers were informed that MacDonnell "will shortly issue orders regarding the partial introduction of the Hindi character "... and asks them to be prepared to celebrate the occasion with eclat. They should offer prayers in their respective temples and mosques for the "long life and prosperity of His Honour, hold illuminations, forward addresses from every district, and erect a statue of His Honour at Allahabad or Benares."

Observer on 22 August 1900, reported an Urdu Defence Meeting in Lucknow: "Among those present were the leading literary men of the day in Lucknow, the leading Maulvis and religious teachers of the Shia and the Sunni schools, and all of them men whom nothing short of a threatened extinction of their mother tongue, and of the character specially adapted to it, could have brought out of their retirement."[65] *Al-Bashir* told its readers on 9 July 1900 that attendance at this meeting was "more important than the *haj*."[66] There was a closing of ranks on the part of the threatened Avadh elite, the big landlords, the men of substance and consequence. However, this initial support dwindled quickly after Lt. Governor MacDonnell leaned on the interests whose power was ultimately dependent on having a congenial relationship with the colonial state. The most dramatic instance of this was the stark choice which MacDonnell offered to Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the Aligarh bigwig: he could either retain his position as Secretary of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, and the official support thereto, or continue to be the prime mover of the counter-mobilisation against MacDonnell's order. The record shows that Mohsin-ul-Mulk chose both promptly and prudently.[67]

Despite the dramatic reactions provoked by MacDonnell's order, however, there was no great change in the situation on the ground. After the celebrations were over, the Nagari/Hindi protagonists discovered that "the wicked *amla* class", the hated clerical tribe, Shore's "harpies", consisting mostly of Kayasthas and Muslims, and wedded to Persian/Urdu, was still very much in place, and administrative business was being carried on more or less as usual. The Nagari Pracharini Sabha made some attempts to provide Nagari scribes, at its own expense, so that deponents might be induced to file their papers in the now-admissible Nagari, but reversing the inertial persistence of the way things had "always" been, was a hard, uphill battle. That is the trouble with symbolic politics: the defeats are real enough—as in the case of the earlier "memorials" and mobilisations—but the victories are hollow, only "symbolic".

And yet, looking back ***on*** this climactic moment, conveniently located on the cusp of the centuries—and not merely ***from*** it, as we have done so far—it is indeed possible to say that something momentous had happened. Though the protagonists could well

feel that after all nothing much had changed, something *had* changed. But the full extent and ramification of what that was would only become apparent as the new century unfolded. It is this that is explored in the final three chapters.

* * *

Meanwhile, however, a profoundly significant change was made in MacDonnell's order during the process of its ratification by the Governor General-in-Council. MacDonnell had, we have noted, pointedly declined "to raise the question of language as distinct from character." However, the unadvertised Clause 3 of the original order had recommended that `no person shall be appointed except in a purely English office, to any ministerial [i.e. clerical] appointment henceforward unless he can read both the Nagari and Persian characters fluently'. The Government of India felt that this was too restrictive, and recommended that instead of requiring knowledge of the Persian and Nagari *characters*, the rule should be amended to require competence in the Hindi and Urdu *languages*. The apparent intent of the proposed amendment was to make things easier. In the event, the idea of two distinct languages was given official endorsement. The Government of NWP—and in time, of course, linguistic reality itself—complied.[68] When the order was officially promulgated by MacDonnell's Government, on 26 June 1900, where it had originally read "the Nagari and Persian characters", it now read *"the Hindi and Urdu languages."* This change was described in the press at that time as "inadvertent" and "a mistake".[69]

There was, as it happens, a proximate reason why MacDonnell *himself* might have been favourably disposed towards this "mistake". A short time before the fateful order was issued, there was an outbreak of plague in Kanpur. The sanitary measures initiated by the colonial government were vigorously resisted by the people of Kanpur, and there was a remarkable—and remarked—degree of cross-communal collaboration in the resistance. On 5 June 1900, the *Times of India* reported the allegation that MacDonnell's order itself—unamended, even—was designed to foil the kind of inter-communal combination seen in the Kanpur plague riots. The *Pall Mall Gazette* of 14 June 1900 cited

MacDonnell's own despatch regarding the Kanpur riots: it appears that MacDonnell was "clear that a concerted plan existed for bringing the regulations to nothing; ...its concocters had succeeded in making the Hindoos and Muhammadans sink their differences..."[70] The Governor-General's "inadvertent" modification however obviated all possibility of such "inter-communal combination" for the foreseeable future.

4

Making a Difference

It is tempting to suppose that but for MacDonnell's prejudices, or Curzon's "mistake", the deep rift that opened up between Hindi and Urdu need never have happened. The poet, Akbar Allahabadi, at any rate, had no doubts about the divisive intent of the colonial masters, and warned his compatriots:

> योरपवाले जो चाहें दिल में भर दें,
> जिसके सर पर जो चाहें तोहमत धर दें।
> बचते रहो इनकी तेज़ियों से अकबर।
> तुम क्या हो ख़ुदा के तीन टुकड़े कर दें।।[1]
>
> These Europeans can fill what they want in our hearts
> Make whomsoever they want appear guilty.
> Beware Akbar of their trickery,
> For what are you, they can split even God into three!

But it must still be said, particularly because of the frequent and easy recourse to "colonial" explanation, that there was *no* clear predisposition in favour of linguistic differentiation on the part of the colonial authorities. During all the decades that the "vernacular controversy" grumbled along, the idea of irreducible linguistic difference—and implicitly, partition—was never once on offer. The official thinking that is apparent in the text-book committees and in the various "notes" generated in the administrative process of coping with the controversy, runs in quite the opposite direction: "... it is desirable for Government to guard

most carefully against passing any orders that may countenance the idea that Hindi and Urdu are two distinct languages."[2] We notice a clear—and, be it said, commonsensical—commitment to the notion of a single vernacular, albeit one that was unfortunately liable to being perverted by two kinds of pedants. Or, putting a positive spin on it, "a language capable of being enriched from two sources."[3]

Indeed, and this must be said unambiguously, *the impulse to divide came from elsewhere*. After all, the key to the whole Nagari/Hindi movement was, ultimately, to establish and gain official recognition for an irreducible and non-negotiable difference. It was *this* that was the ineluctable basis of the proto-elite's (legitimate) claim to a share of the administrative pie. There were *post facto* justifications and rationalisations, and the consequences of first making that claim of difference, and then making good on that claim, spun well beyond the limited local intentions of the original "claimants".

The necessary intransigence of the Nagari/Hindi protagonists becomes all too evident in the matter of the *Kaithi* script. This is a cursive variant of the Nagari script—but its very memory has been all but erased, so that one can have a whole roomful of Hindi intellectuals who have never seen a line of Kaithi, let alone being able to write one. Yet, till but a century back, this script was better known and much more widespread than Nagari.

The great argument in favour of Nagari was that it was more widely used than the Persian script, but the fact of the matter was that the Kaithi variant was even more widely used than the DevaNagari. Thus, the great benefits, benefits democratic and educational, that were expected to flow from the introduction of the DevaNagari script could as plausibly have been expected from Kaithi. But the manner in which the claims of the more widely used Kaithi were ignored needs to be thought about. Kaithi was championed vigorously, for instance, by J.C. Nesfield, he of the famous Grammar, while he was a senior education official in Oudh. When Campbell first ordered the banishment of the Persian script from Bihar in 1873, it was expected to be replaced by *either* Nagari or Kaithi. The Bengal Provincial Committee reporting to the Education Commission in 1883–84 spoke up in favour of Kaithi precisely on the grounds that it was widely in use. It was stated

that the Indigenous schools of Bihar had been able to hold their own *because* the Kaithi character had not been thrust out, unlike in the NWP...[4] Vedalankar cites an 1852 report on Indigenous Education and Vernacular Schools in NWP to the effect that "in all but a few districts", schools using DevaNagari were outnumbered by those using the Kaithi and Mahajani variants of the Nagari. Thus, she extracts the following figures for the numbers of primers used in 1854: DevaNagari: 25151; Kaithi: 77368; Mahajani: 24302.[5]

But Kaithi was unacceptable to the Nagari/Hindi propagandists. It appears that there were some crucial disqualifications that attached to Kaithi. It was perceived to have some association with Hindustani rather than with Sanskrit. It was, moreover, known to Hindus and Muslims alike,[6] and so might not have appeared "pure" enough to proponents of the Nagari variant—*Deva*nagari, no less, the script of the scriptures. Perhaps most crucially, it could not serve as a basis of "differentiation". Thus, for instance, the Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Arrah petitioned the Government in 1912 to *oust* Kaithi from textbooks and substitute DevaNagari for it.[7] Malaviya's *Abhyudaya* too spoke up in favour of Nagari, *against* Kaithi.[8]

What appears to be an arcane controversy regarding two variants of one script turns out however, on closer examination, to be a sublimated form of caste politics. Kaithi is of course, the *tadbhava* form of Kayasthi, the script of the Kayasthas. The antagonism between the Kayasthas and the Brahmins has been one of the great organising (and disorganising) principles of public life in the Hindi heartland: many a ravaged institution testifies to the fact. As one Mahabir Prasad complained in the *Hindi Pradip* in April 1879:

> कायस्थ वर्ग हिन्दी का नाम सुन नाक-भौं सिकोड़ने लगते हैं... यही लोग औरों की अपेक्षा प्रायः पढ़े-लिखे और सभ्य होते हैं पर मातृभाषा हिन्दी के परमशत्रु हैं... हिन्दी का नाम तक नहीं जानते न उर्दू कर सा मज़ा इन्हें मिल सकता है। उर्दू हट जाय तो गौरमेन्ट को अन्धा बनाकर स्वदेशी भाइयों का गला रेतने का सुभीता कैसे मिलेगा?
>
> The Kayasthas are disdainful even at the mere mention of Hindi... But it is these people who are, relative to others, better educated

> and civilised, yet they are the sworn enemies of the mother-tongue Hindi... They know no Hindi, nor can it give them the delights that Urdu can. And if Urdu should be removed, how would they then be able to delude the Government and exploit their fellow-countrymen?

To complicate the picture somewhat: the will of the great Kayastha philanthropist and founder of educational institutions, Munshi Kali Prasad, *stipulated* that the study of Sanskrit and Hindi should be made compulsory in the Trust's institutions. But it is also true that the stipulation was put into effect *after* the promulgation of MacDonnell's order![10] Speaking at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1912, however, Badri Narain Upadhyaya "Premghan" made the deeply significant revelation that the script known as DevaNagari was also known by another name: it was called Babhni, the script of the Brahmins![11]

* * *

The role of the Bengali intelligentsia also deserves attention in this context. In response to a combination of push and pull factors, significant numbers of educated Bengalis moved upriver in quest of livelihoods for the newly educated. The active presence of educated Bengalis in the early Nagari/Hindi agitations was frequently noted by contemporary observers. In an official note of 28 March 1876, the Director of Public Instruction, Oudh identified "the desire of Bengalis to be more extensively employed than at present in the Urdu-speaking provinces of India", as the driving force of the Nagari/Hindi agitation. This was entirely understandable, in his view, since the schools and colleges were turning out educated Bengalis at the rate of 2000 per year, who were unable to find employment in their "overstocked country".[12]

The enlightened interventions of Rajendralal Mitra on behalf of the Nagari script, or Keshub Chander Sen's advice to the Gujarati Dayanand Saraswati to abandon Sanskrit in favour of Hindi for his public discourses are well known. Some of the earliest suggestions regarding Hindi being (made) the national language also emanated from Bengali intellectuals, notably Bankim and Bhudev Mukherji. It appears that Hindi was also used as an axis of mobilisation at the time of the agitation against the partition

of Bengal. At the instance of a Maharashtrian Vedic scholar, Sadashiv Rao, Bengali editors were persuaded to write articles in support of Hindi. Rao also ran classes to teach Hindi to Bengali youth, at his own expense.[13]

One infers a kind of continuity, then, in finding Bengalis prominent in the Banaras Institute and the Allahabad Institute, in the Hunter Commission mobilisations. But there is a crucial difference. The Bengali intellectuals in NWP&O were not addressing an abstract problem of cultural and proto-national honour. They confronted the entirely concrete and oppressive reality of the existing balance of power. Whereas in Bengal, the proportion of Muslims in government service was *less* than their proportion in the population as a whole—an effect of their social backwardness, etc—in NWP the situation was quite the opposite. Here, the Muslims were, relatively, over-represented.[14] Schooled in their own anti-Muslim, anti-peasantry politics—recorded memorably by Tagore in *Ghare-Baire*—the migrating Bengali *bhadralok* elite would have been unsettled to discover that their already ensconced rivals for power and social consequence in NWP were the Urdu-knowing, largely Muslim Avadh elite. Bayly records that there was elite hostility in the NWP towards the *arriviste* and importunate Bengalis[15], and it is reasonable to suppose that the feeling was reciprocated. Further bewilderment would have been afforded by the fact that in this place Hindi, far from being the distinction of the dominant, was merely the *patois* of the disinherited.

There is some evidence that the jute-based rise of the Muslim peasantry in late-nineteenth century Bengal had led to increased insecurity in the emergent Bengali middle class.[16] Moving westwards in quest of fame and fortune, as it were, their insecurity was likely to have been compounded by the discovery that *here* the action had already been cornered by another very different kind of Muslim. Of course the East Bengal peasant and the Avadh landlord did not really have anything in common. But the paranoia of the migrating *bhadralok* fused the two into a false commonalty. They conferred an identity on their disparate rivals because *they* themselves had an identity.

The Bengali support to the Nagari/Hindi struggle was not merely an external, *arithmetic* addition to the struggle: the Bengali

contribution ensured that the Hindi-Urdu confrontation in NWP&O —which soon mutated into a Hindu-Muslim one—also happened under the influence of an alien cultural politics upon a very different cultural zone.

It is highly probable, for instance, that the Bengali *bhadralok* who made the cause of Nagari/Hindi their own were no more pleased at being accused of representing the country bumpkins, the yokels and shopkeepers and lesser folk generally—as was averred by members of the Muslim elite in private and public, as in testimony before the Hunter Commission—than were the uppercaste members of the emergent provincial intelligentsia of NWP&O, or the merchants and traders who had acquired substantial wealth in the period after 1857. Thus, one may see connections between the Sanskritisation of modern Bengali and the Sanskritisation of modern "Hindi". Certainly the latter process was influenced by the former. But the fact of the matter is that the latter process—the Sanskritisation of "Hindi"—happened in the context of an already developed language—Persianised Hindi or Hindustani, if you will—and a dominant Avadh elite that rose to its defence. The process was as ineluctably *contentious* as it was, in the first place, ineluctable.

To put it bluntly, while there was an upper-class element to the Hindu mobilisation in Bengal, the situation in NWP&O was significantly complicated by the presence of a large, and largely-Muslim, upper class, already *in situ*. And unlike his Bengali compatriots, the Hindi reformer and activist in the NWP&O had to *wrest* his language from an entrenched class of people who were, at least then, his social superiors. Thus, the making of "Hindi" from Hindi had an element of social disadvantage and resentment built into its very foundations. This circumstance does not, in my eyes, make the cultural invention of modern "Hindi"—language and agenda—any the less "heroic", but it does impart an enduring anxiety to that invention. Francesca Orsini has written sensitively about the paradox of the Hindi intellectual who is, on the one hand, upper-caste and committed to pursuing a hegemonic cultural agenda, but is also, on the other hand, condemned by the cruelly persistent inequalities of the social system, to subordinate positions.[17] There are good historical reasons why the "Hindi"-wallah is quick to take offence, and is forever burdened with the

suspicion that he is hard done by, and not given due consideration by those whose opinion he is too insecure to disregard.

* * *

The manner in which the Nagari/Hindi struggle takes on a specifically anti-Muslim colour should be, despite the retrospective naturalisations, inherently puzzling. After all, the Avadh elite which the emergent Nagari/Hindi intelligentsia confronted, at least, initially, was Hindu as well as Muslim. The peculiar functionality of "the Muslim" in Hindi-Hindu discourse is something that I have puzzled over in many contexts—in the alleys of Ayodhya, in popular discourse about the contemporary world. In one way and another, "the Muslim" has always seemed critically *insufficient* to carry the burden of responsibility that is laid on his often frail shoulders. Ranajit Guha has written insightfully about the manner in which "the Muslim" becomes the preferred villain in early-nationalist writing, an intellectual device for focussing proto-nationalist resentment with the present condition while simultaneously not transgressing the ground rules of colonial discourse. He writes *a propos* Bankim: "...the force of ideology had brought about a series of displacements to make the Mussulman rather than the British the object of *bahubol* and the remote, pre-colonial past rather than the recent, colonial past its temporal site... By putting *bahubol* in the wrong place in Indian history, that is, by displacing it to the pre-colonial period, it robbed the concept of its true historical vocation as an indispensable element of that critique without which the formation of nationhood ... would not be possible in the era of imperialism."[18] Within the colonial context, "the Muslim" is simply the *nameable* cause of the condition of current degeneracy, a *pragmatic* solution to the riddle of national decline—even when the context makes it apparent that "the Muslim" is only a surrogate for the colonial master.[19] But in the Nagari/Hindi struggle in the NWP&O, however, this essentially "neurotic" explanation acquires a poisonous, escalating autonomy. It triggers the dialectic that transforms the contention over script and language into a desperate struggle between organised religious communities.

No compromise is possible—the dialectic cannot be arrested,

and must indeed be given even greater momentum—because, of course, even in the relatively quiet early passages, the sub-text is still war. Babu Ratna Chandra's *Hindi-Urdu ka Natak*, published in 1890, is yet another theatrically flat rehash of the familiar arguments in a courtroom setting. The English judge, adjudicating between the claims of Hindi and Urdu, recommends a compromise. However, "Hindi"'s counsel, Pandit Buddhi Prakash, the light-of-wisdom himself, summarily rejects the suggestion:

> हमारी मुवक्किला उर्दू बीबी से कदापि सुलह कर अपने कुल में दाग न लगावेगी।
>
> Our client will never compromise with Urdu and so bring dishonour upon her fair name.

If the decision goes against her, he declares, she will return to the wilderness, there to bemoan her fate.

Clearly, this zero-sum game could only get more vicious, and it did. The cause of Nagari/Hindi, of course, commanded a clear democratic (if also moral) advantage, and was soon adopted by the emergent Indian National Congress. An Urdu daily reported a large *anti*-Congress meeting in Lucknow on 3 December 1899, "attended by 5000 gentry", which condemned the Congress support for Nagari.[20] As early as in December 1887, *while* the Indian National Congress was meeting in Madras, Sir Syed Ahmad addressed the Muhammadan Educational Congress in Lucknow. He denounced the Congress as an attempt by "frail-bodied Bengalis" to take over India. Democracy and bureaucratic recruitment by merit were impossible in a land that lacked a homogeneous political community, he said; such a system would only lead to temporary domination by inferior breeds of men. The proper representatives of Indian opinion in the councils of government should be men appointed on the basis of "social position" as determined by ancestry, not ability. "Would our aristocracy like," he continued:

> that a man of low caste and insignificant origin, though he be a B.A. or M.A., and have the requisite ability, should be in a position of authority above them and have power in making the laws that affect their lives and property? Never! Nobody would like it. [Cheers] ...Think for a moment what would be the result if all appointments

were given by competitive examination. Over all races, not only over Mohammadans but over Rajas of high position and the brave Rajputs who have not forgotten the swords of their ancestors, would be placed as ruler a Bengali who at the sight of a table knife would crawl under his chair. [Uproarious cheers and laughter] ...If you accept that the country should groan under the yoke of Bengali rule and its people like the Bengali shoes (?), then, in the name of God! jump into the train, sit down, and be off to Madras, be off to Madras![21]

The Bengali support for Nagari/Hindi is unlikely to have endeared one or the other to Sir Syed and his constituents!

It is difficult not to be overcome, at some point in this narrative, by a sense of fatedness, a sense that script and language were merely a pretext, a convenient site where a bitter zero-sum game over an inadequate social surplus was fought out, a *symptom* of a hard and ineluctable struggle over jobs and access to power.

It is important to see, both in the manifestations and assertions of difference, in the denials and ascriptions of difference, the second-order consequences of distortions and injustices deriving from the process of material production—in this case, the sluggish, stagnant colonial economy. It is important to recognise the exigencies of the socio-economic situation which force impoverished societies, *then and now*, always and everywhere, to practise and devise strategies for practising, innovative and brutal forms of triage. If an inadequate social product is to be shared out, *someone* must lose. And these "losers", sometimes resigned but resentful, sometimes combative and resistant, enter the historical process in the shape of hungry and contentious groups and individuals.

At the time of the early Nagari/Hindi agitation, it is the Nagari/Hindi protagonists who are, so to speak, the party of "hunger". In a manner of speaking, of course. Because, we are dealing with a situation in which illiteracy, total illiteracy in respect of both Nagari/Hindi and Persian/Urdu, was an estimated 97 per cent. [22] So the situation is, in the main, one of squabbling between an entrenched elite—then, the Urdu-wielding Avadh elite—and one that is emergent and aspirant—then, the Hindu-savarna Nagari/Hindi elite. (Later histories, other elites.) The *Devanagari Gazette* of 25 April 1900, for instance, candidly expressed the hope that MacDonnell's "reform would not only promote primary

education [Malaviya's canny argument] but also enable Hindi-knowing men to earn a living."[23]

While on the one side there is "hunger", on the other there is a desperate arrogance. This is how the *Muslim Chronicle* of the same date as the *Devanagari Gazette* above reacted to the same "reform":

> The question of Urdu versus Nagari ... was a contest between refinement and culture on the one hand, and prejudice and barbarism on the other. And if the *fiat* remains as it is, history will have to tell a vandalic chapter as to how [a] British administrator by one stroke of his pen dealt a death blow to the cause of culture and refinement.[24]

"One can hardly come across a man with a Hindi education only," another averred, "to whom the epithet of an educated man could in any sense be applied.."[25]

Clearly, the Nagari/Hindi side was the first to learn the lesson of modern democratic mobilisation. But the other side was not long in getting the message that in a democracy numbers matter.[26] And it takes two to play, really. Just as the Nagari/Hindi protagonists had, in furthering the struggle, invented a vast Hindu constituency which, although functionally illiterate, would still benefit from the change in the "court character", so the members of the Muslim elite too, soon realized that there were advantages to be had in presenting themselves and their interests in the name of a larger community. The British, on their part, were not slow to see the tactical advantage of such a development. Thus, for instance, they were able to counterpose, against the literate Hindus from the maritime Presidencies who were demanding this and that, the loyal Muslims of Hindustan, like Sir Syed and the Aligarh group that broke away from the Congress.[27] When the matter of separate electorates came up, in the context of the Minto-Morley reforms, the British were of course content to let the Muslim elite speak for the Muslims of India as a whole. But Mohammad Ali, addressing the Muslim League in 1908, drew an *explicit* connection between the Muslim vulnerability to the separate-electorates package, and the manner in which Hindi fanatics had reacted after the MacDonnell order.[28]

It is easy to mock the Avadh landlords and their hangers-on, rallying to the doomed defence of privilege, and melting away

at the first hints of official displeasure. They were soon to be replaced by the ideologues of the newly-formed Muslim League. When *Al-Bashir* called its readers to action (on 30 April 1900), it did so with heavy sarcasm, but with none of the sophistication that was the pride of the Avadh Muslim elite: it predicted that "a time will come when they (the Muslims of U.P.) will lead the most degraded lives of Bhils and Gonds. Would that all of them died of plague before that day, so that the Holy Islam may not be brought into discredit by those wretches."[29]

The Avadh elite had always prided itself on its:

> syncretic culture, neither wholly Muslim nor Hindu, but a creative combination of influences from both, confined to the happy few, recruited from several communities, floating upon society like an oilslick upon the water, but destined to be broken in modern times by the waves of populism from below.[30]

The famous "syncretic" and "composite" culture of Avadh had repeatedly been deployed against the protagonists of Hindi. It was urged against the Nagari/Hindi protagonists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that their activities were a threat to communal harmony and cooperation. Sir Syed, indeed, warned of dire outcomes if the claims of Nagari/Hindi were pressed against those of Urdu which, it was said, had been made by the common intercourse of all classes and all communities. The threat to communal peace and harmony was, in fact, a common theme which was taken up by many of the early defenders of the status quo.[31] Not surprisingly, however, the Nagari/Hindi challengers of the status quo had a somewhat less sympathetic perception of that prelapsarian condition and the vaunted "syncretic culture" that had evolved as a consequence of it. To put it bluntly, *this "syncretic" culture was merely the form in which traditional dominance was mediated to them.* It was precisely this hegemony (and indeed this harmony) that the emergent Nagari/Hindi proto-elite simply *had* to challenge. In the particular historical circumstances, the democratic "popularity" of the challenge was practically guaranteed.

It is so easy to fall into nostalgia for this "syncretic culture" that one might as well hear another historian on this culture whose foundation, he writes, was no more than "the unity of the old

service communities [and] was expressed in matters of ritual indifference, a common script, common knowledge of Persian, common forms of dress, and sometimes common participation in religious festivals ... this *community of interest* had given rise to unusually strong sympathies across the religious boundary."[32] D.A. Low dismissed this vaunted culture briskly as a "husk culture", all dried up, no juice: "Because it was an empty shell, there was very little about it to attract troubled, thoughtful men once its validity had come to be challenged, and its lack of vitality was becoming plain for all to see."[33]

It is true that Hindustani/Urdu was said to be a symbol of that "syncretic culture", but when the social equilibrium upon which that culture rested came under threat, it is equally true that Urdu became a symbol of a distinct *communal* identity. This is a recurrent problem: though Sir Syed was pleased to find Urdu in common use all over the country—see above—he also confided, in a personal letter of 1869:

> फ़ारसी लिपि में लिखी उर्दू मुसलमानों की निशानी है[34]

The Muslim League, which took up the matter of the defence of Urdu in a number of its earliest resolutions, was constantly shuffling between Urdu's "national" character *and* the fact that it was a "Muslim" issue. The arch-ideologue of "Hindi", Chandrabali Pandey, points to an obvious difficulty:

> उर्दू कहीं मेल-जोल की मिठाई बतायी जाती है तो कहीं जिहाद करने के लिए 'नबी की ज़बान'।[35]
>
> ...Sometimes Urdu is presented as the creation of a common, composite culture, and sometimes it becomes the language of the Prophet in whose defence, jehad...

Present-day protagonists of Urdu have been unable to escape this ambivalence:

> उर्दू हमारे लिए सिर्फ ज़बान नहीं बल्कि यह हमारी तहज़ीब का नाम है... उर्दू हमारे लिए हमारी तहज़ीब है, हमारा मज़हब है, हमारा माज़ी है और हमारी तारीख़ है...[36]

Urdu is not merely a language for us—it is the name of our culture—Urdu is our culture, our religion, our future and our history...

* * *

To the extent that our concern for the people's vernacular, call it Hindi or Urdu or Hindustani, and even our "secularism" is tied up with the defence of *this* "syncretic culture" it inevitably carries—*and should carry*—the burden of embarrassment which derives from this founding moment. It has to struggle to overcome this historical imbrication with the world of the great Avadh zamindars. Of course, that zamindari world did not consist only of the cliched exploiters of popular mythology. This was also the world of refinement and significant cultural achievements, of *tahzeeb* and *takalluf*. Indeed, in a crucial sense, this world not only comprised but was also, in the last analysis, *made* by the Avadh peasantry. Thus, one would be well within one's rights in speaking not only of elite secularism but also, deriving from that shared world, of the existential modus vivendi of those self-same peasants, of mass secularism, of a sturdy subaltern culture of coexistence.

But the critical question, brought into sharp focus by the rise to power of the Nagari/Hindi elite is: *can that popular secularism (and perhaps even Urdu?) be rescued from the fatal embrace of the zamindari order and its successor nostalgias?* Rahi Masoom Raza's novel, *Aadha Gaon*, is the classic exploration of this difficult terrain where the nostalgic memory of social harmony is inextricably bound up with a historical awareness of inequality, and injustice, and exploitation.

It is understandable that the Nagari/Hindi proto-elite had no love lost for this "culture". But when push came to shove, when the chips were down and the gloves were off, so to speak, *neither did the Avadh elite.* Ironically, the agents of populism—the "uncompromising men of religion, ... the footloose agitators", [7] were invited into the hitherto privileged arena of politics by the members of the Avadh elite itself. Not surprisingly, these new recruits had no commitment towards, no emotional or other investment in that "syncretic culture".

There is a remarkable exchange in Babu Ratna Chandra's 1890

propagandist playlet, *Hindi-Urdu ka Natak*, between the Urdu/Muslim characters. An older man, Buddhe Khan, remembers even in the midst of the contention that forms the substance of the "playlet", that it is the first day of spring, Basant Panchami. He considers it a characteristic of the time—*zamaane ki khubi*—that *he* remembers these old traditions while the younger people have so little regard for them. He explains that he is in favour of retaining those customs which were maintained by his victorious ancestors:

> हमारे बुजुर्गों ने इस मुल्क को फ़तह करने के बाद ज़रूरी समझ हमारे हिन्दू भाइयों को खुश करने के लिए और आपस में मेल बढ़ाने के लिए...जारी रखना ज़रूरी समझा था। इस बात से कौन इन्कार कर सकता है कि जो मोहब्बत इन जलसों के बीच बैठने से बाहम पैदा हो जाती है वो बहुत गहरी होती है।
>
> (These customs) our ancestors continued, after they conquered the country, in order to please our Hindu brethren and bring about harmony...For who can deny that the love and good feeling that comes about as a consequence of participating in such festivals is very deep...

He deplores the disappearance of these traditional festivals, and the consequent growing distance between Muslims and Hindus. But, significantly, his younger co-religionists are entirely unsympathetic:

> देखिए जनाब को इस सत्तर बरस की उमर में बसंत की तैयारी की याद कैसी रही। रोज़े-नमाज़ की याद तो हर रोज़ भूल जाती है। परन्तु इस बसन्त में उर्दू बीबी का गाना सुनने की याद कभी नहीं भूलती।
>
> Just see how this seventy year-old remembered the necessary preparations for the Basant festival! He forgets about the namaz and penances each day—but he always remembers that he should hear the singing of Urdu bibi in the springtime...

The consequences of inviting the hard new breed of men into the arena of politics, hindsight tells us, spun well beyond the control, or even the imagination, of the good people who had initiated the strategy. Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal summarized the process thus: "In the circumstances of the U.P., communalism was a high card in the safe game the Muslim members of the elite played with

their rulers in Government House and Council Chamber, but was a wild card when placed on the mat in the dangerous realities of the base."[38]

There is a danger of reading this history retrospectively. Then, the "blame" for all the destructive consequences which flowed from particular initiatives and agitations is laid upon the heads of the pioneers. Thus, one blames the elite patrons of the Muslim League, who seemed driven by an inexorable logic, from resisting Nagari/Hindi, all the way to Pakistan. Difficult though it often is, it is perhaps essential to be forgiving towards those who lived their history *prospectively*, without the benefit of hindsight. But a similar charity must also be extended to the Nagari/Hindi side also. In their case too, innocent beginnings—seeking a place in the colonial sun for their increasingly restive constituents—led to consequences which one may, *as I do*, deplore.

But I would argue further, that the retrospectively identified *agent* of the Nagari/Hindi struggle—the savarna Hindu middle class of the Hindi heartland—is itself a *product* of this struggle. Its poisonous agenda, indexed by its much-misunderstood slogan—Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan!—is, once again, produced within, and by the constraints of, the particular struggle. My point in insisting on the historical origins of this, in my opinion, dangerous cultural formation, and of the class that constructs, embodies and inhabits it, within the Nagari/Hindi struggle is not, in fact, inculpation or exculpation. There is little to be gained, in such matters, by pointing fingers or seeking to identify the always-mythical first offenders. It is rather to locate some historical ground or process on and within which the rapidly proliferating cultural agenda that crystallises around Hindi—"Hindi" nationalism, in fact—may in fact be situated so that it has a credible origin. The only alternative has to be some kind of Machiavellianism, a diabolism identified by its appropriate symbol, the devilish Brahmin with his displaced tail.

5

The Heroic Agenda

> ...heroes in so far as they have drawn their goals and vocations not only from the tranquil ordered stream of events sanctioned by the reigning system, but from a source whose content is hidden and has not yet attained actual existence, in the still subterranean internal spirit which knocks for admittance to the external world, and breaks its way in...
>
> [Hegel, Introduction to *The Philosophy of History*]

In the 1840s, a certain Dr J.R.Ballantyne was the principal of the Benares College. The Education Department's Annual Report of 1846–47 tells of Dr Ballantyne making several attempts to "improve" the *Hindi* style of his students. The results, it appears, were not to his liking and finally, exasperated, he asked the bemused students to write an essay on the following question: "Why do you despise the culture of the language you speak every day of your lives, of the only language which your mothers and sisters understand?" The students couldn't make out what Dr Ballantyne was driving at, and one of them spoke up on behalf of the group:

> We do not clearly understand what you Europeans mean by the term Hindi, for there are hundreds of dialects, all in our opinion equally entitled to the name, and there is here no standard as there is in Sanskrit.... If the purity of Hindi is to consist in its exclusion of Mussulman words, we shall require to study Persian and Arabic in order to ascertain which of the words we are in the habit of issuing

every day is Arabic or Persian, and which is Hindi. With our present knowledge we can tell that a word is Sanscrit, or not Sanscrit but if not Sanscrit, it may be English, or Portuguese instead of Hindi for anything that we can tell. English words are becoming as completely naturalized in the villages as Arabic and Persian words, and what you call the Hindi will eventually merge in some future modification of the Oordoo, nor do we see any great cause of regret in the prospect.[1]

Dr Ballantyne, on the other hand, had something completely different in mind: "It was the duty of himself and his brother Pundits," he admonished the student:

> not to leave the task of formulating the national language in the hands of the villagers, but to endeavour to get rid of the unprofitable diversity of provincial dialects, by creating a standard literature in which one uniform system of grammar and orthography should be followed; the Pundits of Benares, if they valued the fame of their city, ought to strive to make the dialect of the holy city the standard of all India, by writing books which should attract the attention and form the taste of all their fellow countrymen.

(In point of fact, neither Bhojpuri nor its typical Banarasi variant was *ever* a contender for the exalted national-cultural role that Ballantyne was recommending, but his ignorance does not detract from his zeal.) What Ballantyne was proposing was truly a *heroic* endeavour. It involved the bringing into being, on a mass scale, of not merely a language but also new modes of consciousness, a new sensibility.

Though Dr Ballantyne's students were reluctant to rise to the challenge, the very next generation saw the emergence, in Banaras and Allahabad, of a number of remarkable people who took it upon themselves to forge, as it were, the uncreated conscience—the consciousness and the culture—of a whole class of people, the bearers of modern "Hindi". I have suggested that even this "class of people" was in some sense an invention, a historical creation, a phenomenon that crystallised in the mobilisation around a relatively small core of elite disgruntlement and ambition: broadly, the "Court Character" agitation. But in order for this class truly to come into its own, it was crucial that it be endowed not only with a suitable language but also with an appropriate consciousness and identity and become, as it were, a class-for-itself.

* * *

After all, the cultural impulse that finds expression and embodiment in the world of modern "Hindi" must finally spring from sources deeper than the mischievous (or absent-minded) emendation of MacDonnell's original order, or the follies of educational administration in nineteenth century NWP&O. Thus, for instance, the story of the making of modern "Hindi" is incomplete without taking into account the contribution of the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj was, essentially, a Hindu social reform movement, committed somewhat quixotically to the recovery of "Vedic excellence" in all spheres. Its founder, Dayanand Saraswati, was a Gujarati, and the major arena of operation of the Arya Samaj was the Punjab. No doubt this was the reason why much of the work of the Arya Samaj was done in Urdu, despite the founder's commitment to, and apparently formidable competence in, Sanskrit. However, Dayanand Saraswati was persuaded to adopt Hindi instead of Sanskrit, and the Hindi that developed under this complex of influences grew progressively distant from Urdu, and became more and more Sanskritised "Hindi".

There was another respect in which the Arya Samaj contribution is significant. The Arya Samaj's social reform initiatives were vigorously resisted by more traditional, *sanatani* institutions—and finally an apex body, the Sanatan Dharm Mahamandal was set up because of the efforts of the Bengali Swami Gyanananda. The quickening tempo of religious controversy led to an enormous explosion of publishing and public speaking, necessarily in a Hindi that could not remain unmarked by the religious, revivalist and conservative context in which it was being formed. Though Hindu society might not have been reformed quite as much as the Arya Samaj desired, Hindi certainly was.[2] Hindi was made a compulsory subject in all the educational institutions set up by the Arya Samaj; for girls, it was also made the medium of instruction.[3] In an important essay that examines the interplay between "Hindu revivalism and the making of modern Hindi", Krishna Kumar points out also that it was apparently the Arya Samaj that provided the initial inspiration for the founding of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha.[4]

Just as there are many lines of causation and motivation that converge on the invention of modern "Hindi", so there is much more that springs from, and spins off from, that invention than

could ever have been imagined by the pioneers. Forging that uncreated consciousness was, in ways that remain unacknowledged by friends and detractors alike, a heroic endeavour: it was also an endeavour that inevitably involved several different kinds of forging.

* * *

In fact, so many lines of causation converge on—and diverge from—the Hindi-Urdu contention of the early twentieth century that the whole process has an air of fatedness about it, as if the apparent historical agents weren't really *agents* at all, but only the *instruments* of some deep historical process. Similarly, much of what became (of) modern "Hindi" seems to derive from the fact and the detail of that bruising and inevitably prolonged confrontation. It was the considered view of one of the most profound scholars of *Purani Hindi* that *but* for the process of contention which distorted it, Hindi was well on its way to becoming the national language—he says *desh-bhasha*—anyway:

> यदि छापाखाना, प्रान्तीय अभियान, मुसलमानों का फ़ारसी लिपि का आग्रह और नया प्रान्तीय उद्‌बोधन न होता तो हिन्दी अनायास ही देश-भाषा बनी जा रही थी। अधिक छपने-छापने, लिखने और झगड़ों ने भी इसकी गति को रोका....[5]
>
> If the printing presses, the growth of regional pride, the Muslims' insistence on the Persian script, and the spread of a new regional consciousness had not happened, Hindi was well on its way towards becoming the language of the whole country. Too much printing, too much controversy and conflict, all these also impeded its growth...

* * *

However, it is important to remember that there is also something that is *missed* in narrating these developments only as a fatal *pas de deux*: Hindi and Urdu, captured together in one historical moment and one grammatical framework, locked in a bitter complementarity, each matching the extravagant excesses of the other, so that no matter how far they move apart, each is forever bound with the other.

There is also, at some level, an *autonomous* dynamic that is at work in respect of *both* Urdu and Hindi—so that the story of one is not, howsoever sensitively decoded, also the story of the other. Frances Pritchett has written an account of a highly significant moment in the formation of modern Urdu: the more or less contemporaneous publication of Mohammad Husain Azad's *Ab-i-Hayat* and Hali's *Musaddas*. Both these highly influential works offer a critique of earlier Urdu literature—and call for the creation of a modern Urdu literature. Thus they stand at, and have been identified as standing at, the dawn of a new age, pioneers of modernity—rather like Hindi's Bharatendu. However, there are crucial differences—and I will make my argument about Hindi against my reading of Pritchett's argument about Urdu.[6]

Although Azad and Hali are self-consciously pioneers of modernity, their work is subject to the operation of a profoundly paradoxical dialectic. For both men, the crucial formative experience was the upheaval, and the vicious repression of 1857. Since it was "old India" that had risen up in revolt against them in 1857, the British were determined to extirpate every last sign of that "old India". It is unlikely that the British had a civilisational theory to guide them in their reprisals, but the fact is that their insensate brutality created a true civilisational abyss, an increasingly impassable darkness. This violence is comparable to the Holocaust, which has made the old world of European Jewry (and not only Jewry) virtually inaccessible except through the nostalgia of a few aging survivors. The physical locations, the institutions and the relationships, the fabric that sustained and sheltered that world was ripped to shreds. All this is familiar, at least in respect of the Holocaust.

When we come to 1857, however, there is an important difference: *it is as if Nazi Germany had won the war.* After 1857, there was no Nuremberg, no "justice", no repentance, no Israel. The surviving victims were condemned to living with the victorious victimisers: the "guilt" of 1857 was visited solely on the victims, while the vengeful victors became also the party of virtue, of progress and modernity. Indeed, and this is crucial: the post-1857 *modus vivendi* under vindictive colonial aegis required that this "virtue" be acknowledged, that the victims perform, for decades

to come, versions of *mea culpa*, rituals of repentance for something that took close to half a century before it could be transformed, in collective consciousness, into a moment not of shame but of an ambiguous sort of pride. Ram Bilas Sharma's glorification of the 1857 uprising as the founding moment of an indigenous and even radical modernity[7] is a much more recent development. And as I have argued, it is the *repression* of the uprising, and the repression of the memory of the uprising as well as the repression, that have greater explanatory relevance for us.

But what was the cultural and civilisational cost of this repression? Since the violators could not be named, the only way in which the violence could be 'reconciled' with by its victims was by being internalised—by being, in some sense, *justified*. Thus, the world, the "old India" that the British had destroyed, had to be trashed and reviled as deserving no better. Because if that were *not* the case, how did that reflect on the poor inheritors of that civilisation? Ironically, the only way in which the victims could come to terms with that violence was by *continuing* it. In that way they could simultaneously exonerate the British—who couldn't in any case even be named as the villains—*and* themselves, the impotent, historically incapacitated inheritors.

This complex process of cultural accommodation, enjoined by a realistic submission to *force majeure*, had far-reaching consequences. In Azad and Hali, but also in the Urdu sensibility generally, it translated into a melancholic, elegiac quality, into a nostalgia that can be represented politically as an arrogant hankering after the power of the Mughal dynasty and the Muslim aristocracy generally, but derives in fact from a sense of defeat and irredeemable loss. To put it somewhat schematically, for Azad and Hali, a source of civilisational value must be located in the pre-1857 world, but it also *cannot* be acknowledged: this is the paradox on which they are crucified. *The source of civilisational value, and the cause of civilisational degeneration and defeat, can hardly be kept distinct.*

The corresponding Hindi-Hindu discourse—Hindi's "autonomous dynamic", so to speak—that develops after 1857 develops under the constraints of an intellectual economy that is analogous in many ways, but which is also crucially different. Thus, it is similar in that there is a shared experience of civilisational

shattering, of trauma—as well as the suffocation of having to submit to the domination of the victors. There is a similar acceptance of the British-colonial view of the degeneracy of their own civilisation, the same loss of cultural confidence that attaches a disproportionate value to the perceptions that emanate from the colonial masters. (It is this often unconscious "censorship" after 1857 which marks the crucial difference from early modernisers like, say, Ram Mohun Roy and Derozio.) Ironically enough, one of the consequences of all this is that the early-Hindi critique of the world before 1857, *mutatis mutandis* the world of Urdu culture, is along lines that derive, almost verbatim, from the Urdu modernisers Azad and Hali themselves!

However, the drama gets played out differently for the Hindi and Urdu ideologues. Whereas Azad and Hali are torn between the paradoxical compulsions of having to locate value and defect in *one* location—in the world that was destroyed in 1857—the Nagari/Hindi ideologue finds a different solution. Thus, for these latter, the defect—degeneracy, collapse, defeat, etc.—which cannot be located in the immediate colonial context can however, with colonial connivance, be located in the pre-colonial past, in "the centuries of Muslim tyranny". It is likely, of course, that this hardy myth came to NWP along with the migratory Bengali *bhadralok*—but it soon developed, in a very different socio-cultural context, a new and vigorous life. Here, with a dominant and largely Muslim zamindari elite, the "tyranny" was no longer merely mythical.

It gave the colonial rulers a legitimising ideology and the Hindi-Hindu ideologues an acceptable—indeed, an increasingly serviceable—explanation for a condition of present degeneracy, a way of accommodating the hastily repressed memory of the trauma of 1857. At some point, the Orientalist discovery of Sanskrit and the glories of ancient India, and the nationalists' enthusiastic reinforcement of the same, simply reinforced the tendency that was anyway present in the post-1857 dynamic. Thus, in the "cultural solution" that was developed by the Hindi-Hindu ideologue, there is none of the tension, the self-laceration that characterises the Urdu-Muslim ideologue. For the Hindi-Hindu ideologue, the source of value, and the cause of its degeneracy and defeat are located in different places—different from each other, and different from where they are located for the

Urdu-Muslim ideologue. For obvious reasons—fear, greed, neurotic submission to *force majeure*—both kinds of ideologues pay lip-service to the values of the oppressor. But the source of redemptive value is and must be located at different places. Thus the Hindi-Hindu ideologue is able to make an easier accommodation with the colonial master than the Urdu-Muslim one. He can dissociate himself from the immediate defeat—*but at the cost of transforming the complex cultural process of the preceding centuries into nearly a whole millennium of defeat.*

This strategy inevitably involves complex feats of accommodation, of adjusting and massaging the historical record: the sedulously asseverated myth of "Muslim tyranny", with all its variations. Thus, Sri Narain Chaturvedi can declare, unambiguously, without fear of contradiction:

> मुस्लिम काल में हिन्दु भारत एक बंद कोठरी की तरह था।[8]
> In the Muslim period, Hindu India was like a prison cell.

He then, predictably, connects the rise of the Hindi movement of the late nineteenth century with a Hindu renaissance, and relates both to the demise of the Mughal order—except of course that there is an awkward time-lag of a few centuries that needs to be explained. This awkwardness is also, naturally, compounded by the fact that the centuries of 'Muslim tyranny' happen to coincide with the highest achievements of Hindi's preferred tradition: Sur, Kabir, Tulsi. Thus, Lala Sita Ram was forced to acknowledge a "curious coincidence" in 1930:

> यह एक विचित्र संयोग था जिसे दैव संयोग कहना ही ठीक होगा, कि हिन्दी पद्य-साहित्य का उत्थान उसी समय से हुआ जब से मुसलमानों ने हिन्दुस्तान पर अपना आतन्क जमाना आरंभ किया। आगे मुसलमान बादशाहों की उन्नति के उच्चतम शिखर पर पहुँचने के समय... हिन्दी कविता भी उच्चतम शिखर पर पहुँच रही थी।[9]
> It is a curious coincidence which should properly be called a divine coincidence that Hindi poetry really rose in the same time when the Muslims began to establish their rule of terror in Hindustan. Later, as the Muslim emperors rose to the height of their greatness... Hindi poetry too reached its highest summit.

However, "curious coincidences" apart, we note the recourse yet

again to the powerful tripartite narrative framework: ancient, golden; medieval, dark; modern, wonderful ourselves! Clearly, this narrative framework derives strength from the tripartite division of European history—though it is in the process of being rethought there also. But it has specific functions in the Indian present. It demonises "the Muslim" who, improbably saddled with the whole of medieval India is also, crucially, the present competitor for an inadequate social surplus. It also liberates the emergent Hindu intelligentsia from historical baggage, and frees it to engage in the task of cultural retrieval/invention. The fact is that the historical foundations of this tripartite division in Indian history are dubious: notably, the "dark" medieval period, far from being a period of ignorance and despair, is a time of significant cultural and intellectual achievement. But its taproot into contemporary neuroses provides this tripartite-hypothesis with a richer source of sustenance than mere historical reality ever could.[10]

* * *

The most prominent influence in the complex of determinations out of which modern "Hindi" emerged is, of course, the contention with Urdu. Perhaps the most obvious and far-reaching consequence that flowed, both from Urdu's elite status, as well as the early accusation of Urdu protagonists that Hindi was no language at all but only the patois of lesser folk, was a concern with lineage and pedigree.

As it happens, Urdu itself had a similar anxiety as one of its constituent—some would say, foundational—elements. The issue of the purist and exclusivist tendency in Urdu is one of considerable complexity: for example, the snobbish tendency which sought to distinguish Urdu from the humble *bhasha*, sought also to distinguish Urdu from Persian. In fact, the relations between Persian, Indian Persian (*sabak-i-hindi*) and Urdu are complex and historically variable. Muzaffar Alam recounts an anecdote which, with necessary economy, illustrates something of this complexity. Some officials with North Indian connections suggested that the Nizam's administration in Hyderabad change over from Persian to Urdu. The Prime Minister, Salar Jung, rejected the suggestion angrily: " Persian language is the symbol of the victory of the

Muslims... Having destroyed this symbol in your own country, you people now want darkness here too."[11] Persian is, of course, a symbol of past glory—*but Urdu, just as crucially, is not*. Urdu is the implicit symbol of North Indian "degeneracy" and cultural compromise. Of course, in time, Urdu gets both Persianised and Arabicised, *and* identified as a symbol of Muslim cultural arrogance, but this process has a complexity and an autonomy that gets lost in the *tu quoque* mode of rendering this history of linguistic division, in which Sanskritised Hindi is a response to Persianised Urdu is a response to ... and so on, ad infinitum, ad nauseum, and worse. It diminishes both processes, Persianisation and Sanskritisation, to deny them a certain autonomy—to make them merely mirror images of each other.

Perhaps the iconic moment that best captures this exclusivist tendency in Urdu is Vali's famous visit to Delhi in 1700. The story has Vali, Vali Dakani, already an established and accomplished poet in the Dakani variety of the great "middle" vernacular, Hindavi, being advised by Gulshan, a minor Delhi poet, to avail himself of the riches of Persian and thus acquire "class". Vali does so, returns to his native Aurangabad a transformed man, abjures his native vernacular and composes poetry in a Persianised idiom that takes the sophisticated literary world of Delhi by storm when his *divan* arrives there in 1720. Strictly on the basis of the evidence, this is an unlikely story.[12] But mere factual disproof or demurral does nothing to demolish the mythic status of this probably mythical incident, recounted by Urdu ideologues with pride, and by Hindi ideologues with a passionate sense of cultural insult.

Still, there might be some point in putting down some of the facts that are not in dispute. With the arrival of Shah Alam at the Red Fort in Delhi in 1772, Urdu became "nominally" the language of power. However, Shah Alam himself didn't have much power—he was blinded and deposed by Ghulam Qadir in 1788, then "restored to power" by the Marathas a few months later. Thus there is a certain irony built into the identification of Urdu with power, both by its protagonists and by its enemies. Still, in the late eighteenth century there emerged amongst the elite associated with the late-Mughal court, an "almost morbid obsession with `correctness'. There are several elements to this: the snobbish disdain of the Delhi elite for all non-Delhi users of the language,

as demonstrated in the significant if apocryphal story of Mir refusing to talk to his travelling companions for the entire duration of the journey from Delhi to Lucknow for fear that while his talk may entertain his fellow-travellers, his own language would be corrupted! Even the definition of the Delhi elite is further narrowed down by Inshallah Khan in *Dariya-i-Latafat*, that arch-manual of snobbish rectitude, to signify *only* the people resident within a short distance of the Red Fort: the aristocrats of the Red Fort and their courtiers, and some women, such as their wives and their prostitutes:

जो लफ्ज़ उनमें इस्तेमाल हुआ, उर्दू हो गया।[12]
...Whatever word they used, that became Urdu...

This Insha, incidentally, is the same man whom we have already encountered in the context of "Fort William"—admirer and exponent of *theth Hindi*, the ideally "middle" people's language, so that at the very least we are dealing with complex attitudes, maybe even irony.[13] But it is an irony that Hindi-wallahs in the late nineteenth century were ill-placed to appreciate.

In the ambivalent relationship to Persian, there is the desire of the Indian elite to give *their* language, their Urdu, something of the status of Persian; there is also, and most crucially for our story, a conscious policy of removing words of obviously indigenous origin from "proper" Urdu. This is how S.R. Faruqi summarises this process: "There is no doubt that the proportion of *tatsama* vocabulary declined in Rekhta/Hindi [by which he means Urdu] over the second half of the eighteenth century... Urdu literary culture from the late eighteenth century on does place an unfortunate stress on "purism", "language reform", "purging the language of undesirable usages", and worst of all, privileging all Persian-Arabic over all Urdu..."[14] There is thus a clear sense of a language that is in wider use, by all manner and classes of people. But from this language a narrow, Persianised subset is sought to be carved out, and dignified by the name Urdu. Syed Maulvi Ahmed Dehalvi, author of the Farhang-i-Asafiya [A Q] expresses his disapproval of the usages of the hoi polloi:

... ना उस आज़ादाना उर्दू ही को पसंद करते हैं जो हिन्दुस्तान के इसाइयों, नौ-मुसलिम भाइयों, ताज़ा विलायत साहब लोगों, खानसभाओं,

ख़िदमतगारों, पूरब के मनहियों... ने अख़्तियार कर रखी है।

...Nor do we approve of that Urdu which is used by the Christians of Hindustan, by newly-converted Muslims, by foreigners newly arrived, by their cooks and attendants, and by rural folk from the Eastern districts...

This people's language is derisively called "Purdu" by the lexicographer and his friends, while the name "Urdu" is sought to be restricted to the synthetic dialect of an ever-narrower elite.[16] And when this Delhi declined and Lucknow became a centre of Muslim-aristocratic concentration, the Lucknow elite in turn outdid the Delhi one in perverse Persianisation. Not surprisingly, after the fall of Avadh, this language too was orphaned.

The fact that such a tendency existed is undeniable: it continues to exert pressure, threatens to deform Urdu into "Urdu" to this day. However, my immediate concern is with the fact that from the latter half of the nineteenth century, this "tendency" also played an important part in the process of deforming Hindi into "Hindi". The burden of this history—both message and avoirdupois—which is and should be a matter of consuming interest to Urdu-wallahs, could not help becoming an overwhelming concern of the "excluded" too. In so far as Urdu and Hindi are part of *one* linguistic domain (or spectrum, or 'system'), this tendency has had a powerful effect on the evolution of modern Hindi—"Hindi"—also.

Of course all such attempts—then and now, in respect of "Urdu" and modern Sanskritised "Hindi"—are inevitably doomed. Languages grow through use—i.e. incorrectness and several kinds of slippage are built into the process. But the social disdain that informed Urdu exclusivism was to prove profoundly consequential well beyond the limited matter of Urdu's literary idiom. The exclusionary impulse in Urdu is, unarguably, a part of the evolution of modern Hindi's self-consciousness—though not in any obvious or direct way. Thus, Insha'llah Khan's *Dariya-i-Latafat* was written, in Persian, in 1808, and first published, in 1849, from Murshidabad in Bengal. The Urdu translation was published only in 1935!

But no one who has even a cursory acquaintance with the evolution of modern Hindi's self-consciousness can miss the outrage and the passion, the hurt and humiliation that informs

the rehearsal—in document after document, address after address—of the particularly egregious moments of this arrogant exclusionary impulse. The Hindi ideologue tends to fuse Urdu's complex history of affinity and antagonism with Persian and Arabic into *one* hated mass of arrogance and cultural contempt. Time and time again the Hindi ideologue returns to the same set of themes, of wounded vanity and hurt pride. He is overwhelmed by a desire to redeem, if only by rhetorical excess, the lost centuries—redeem them in the name of an ancient, wounded civilisation.[17]

The irony is that if in fact Urdu and Hindi *had* been distinct languages—as their ideologues contend—then the violence that Urdu grammarians and lexicographers sought to inflict on their own language should have been irrelevant to the makers of modern Hindi. However, it is precisely *because* the names Urdu and Hindi designate a common and shared linguistic inheritance—shared by all religious groups and classes—that the exclusionary violence of the Urdu-ideologue can be invoked as a legitimation by the Hindi-ideologue. The sheer irrationality of the resultant cultural process provoked Padma Singh Sharma, the prodigiously learned author of *Hindi, Urdu, Hindustani*, to recount an anecdote about a greying man who had two wives: while the older wife plucked out his black hairs so that he would become more like her, the younger wife plucked out the grey ones!

There must be deep historical reasons why so many of the modernising languages of India went through a Sanskritising stage. Sanskrit belongs—certainly at the level of myth, where it is the literal and always-already perfect language of the gods; but to some limited extent, in its grammatically embalmed, frozen, marmoreal quality, in reality, too—to a trans-historical realm, a magical cultural enclave wherein one finds sanctuary and redemption from the muddled compromises and corruptions of history. Of course, the politics of each of these modern Sanskritising attempts—politics antecedent and consequent—these labours of cultural reconstruction and invention were different. Sanskritising Tamil or Bangla or Gujarati were bound to be very different processes.[18]

But in the case of modern "Hindi" at any rate it can be stated confidently that the Sanskritising impulse was driven also by a concern with status and pedigree: for the pauper to be recognized as a prince, after all, there had to be a climactic revelation of a

direct filial relationship with Sanskrit![19] But the fake Sanskrit pedigree didn't come cheap. In the face of linguistic evidence (both lexical and syntactical)—it was sought to be established that Hindi had such a direct filial relationship with Sanskrit—eldest daughter to be precise, *jyeshtha putri*! This eldest daughter, then, takes precedence over the other daughters—Bangla, Marathi, Gujarati. (The families get quite elaborate in India: thus, on one account, Persian is Sanskrit's sister/cousin!) Tandon, interestingly, rejects the filial relationship with Sanskrit, and proposes instead that Sanskrit is only the "sister" of Hindi's putative mother![20] But even as one sees the farcical aspect of all this, one must not lose sight of the politics. Thus, while at one level, classical lineage and sibling relationship with other Indian languages is claimed, simultaneously the real relationship with Urdu is suppressed and denied. Indeed, it may be said in summary that modern "Hindi" is *defined* by this dialectic of elective affinity (with Sanskrit) and elective disaffinity (with Urdu). As a matter of fact, both these moves are historically and linguistically absurd and untenable. But the damage they wreak is real enough.

The social arrogance which Urdu protagonists had expressed in respect of Hindi—low-born, yokelish, etc—finds a curious reflection in the terms in which Hindi protagonists describe Urdu. Thus, in their descriptions, Urdu becomes the language of prostitutes and the brazen and degenerate urban culture that is associated with them and their feudal clients. "Hindi", by the same token, becomes the language of simplicity and virtue, as against Urdu's deceitful meretriciousness. Repeatedly, Urdu is represented as the flashy and young second wife, whose obvious attractions do not have the solid durability of the good old first wife Hindi. It must be this metaphor that is at work at some level when Hazari Prasad Dwivedi writes that because of the efforts of Bharatendu and his contemporaries, Hindi miraculously became young once again![21] One is perhaps still imprisoned within the same metaphor when it is said in respect of Urdu that it has dubious, even alien origins—and that its lexical loyalties are extra-territorial. This allegation of exchanging the simple pleasures of the domestic hearth, and yearning for the distant delights of Persia and Arabia(!) is lent credence by numerous Urdu ideologues—who of course put a different spin, a different narrative-metaphorical cloak on the whole transaction!

One effect of all this was, understandably, a turning away from the large-scale borrowings from the Persian and Arabic register which had produced a disfigured "Urdu". However, the suspicion extended further to the usages that had emerged over the centuries—simply through the action of time and the frictions of coexistence upon words and expressions deriving from a myriad, often unknown, sources. These are the famous *tadbhavas—sundar, sughad* beautiful, well-formed, capable—which are indeed the glory of Hindi. According to the poet Firaq Gorakhpuri, ironically, the ability to use the expressive and fluent *tadbhavas* is a sign of sophistication—and recourse to purist *tatsamas* is a sign of rustic cultural anxiety![22] Thus Fallon, in his great 1879 dictionary, glosses *bhuccha* or yokel as someone who is unable to use tadbhava-rich Hindustani!

But for the most fastidious practitioners of linguistic Brahminism, these *tadbhavas* too came under the suspicion of *Urdupan—urdu*-ness, sleeping with the enemy. It is not as if there weren't voices from within the Hindi world itself warning *against* this process of substituting *tatsamas* for *tadbhavas*.[23] And it is certainly not as if the effort was, or could ever be, successful. But the purist impulse obviously sprang from some deeper collective neurosis, and the distortion that it induced has had a decisive effect on the making of modern "Hindi".

The process of the Sanskritisation of Hindi—the making of "Hindi"—is not something that was accomplished without resistance. We have already noted the warning voices that were raised against this "invention" in the context of the school textbooks. Sitaram Chaturvedi invoked the authority of Malaviya himself to argue against the rampant Sanskritisation:

> वे ठेठ संस्कृत के शब्दों के बहुत काम में लाने को अच्छा नहीं समझते थे... ये बड़ी सरल, सबकी समझ मे आने वाली हिन्दी लिखते और बोलते थे, ऐसी नही जिसे समझने के लिए कोश टटोलना पड़े...[24]
>
> He did not approve of the use of heavy Sanskrit words... He wrote and spoke a simple, easily comprehensible Hindi, not one that required recourse to a dictionary...

Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi is commonly identified as one of the key

figures in the emergence of modern "Hindi" through his editorial labours in *Saraswati*. But Dwivedi too is a mere novice when it comes to the mature Sanskritised "Hindi" style. This is frequently so extreme as to sound like a parody, as in these phrases in a letter from Sridhar Pathak to Padma Singh Sharma:

> प्रियवर्य श्री पद्मसिंह जी: नति निवेदम्। आपका सुश्लाभ्यशालीनता शोभित शुभ पत्र यथासमय समागत हुआ। अस्वस्थतावश उत्तर विलम्बित हो गया, एतदर्थ क्षमा प्रार्थित है।[25]
>
> ...Dear and esteemed Shri Padmasinghji, I bow my head in reverence to you. Your letter, embellished as ever with your commendable decency, arrived on time. But because a state of ill-health delayed my response thereto, I crave your forgiveness...

The disease is simultaneously epidemic and endemic.

Rambilas Sharma cites a 1915 article from *Bharatmitra* which Dwivedi republished in *Saraswati* with evident approval *against* this "Hindi". In this there was the interesting argument that this linguistic process was being driven by the cultural dominance of Sanskritised Bangla rather than because of any direct Sanskrit influence:

> बँगला भाषा की पुस्तकों से हिन्दी को आश्रय अवश्य मिला, पर भाषा की आत्मा दब गयी। जिसे मिश्रबंधु हिन्दी पर संस्कृत का आक्रमण कहते हैं वह वास्तव में संस्कृत का नहीं, बँगला का है।[26]
>
> It is undeniable that books in the Bangla language provided crucial support to Hindi, but they also suppressed its soul. That which the Misrabandhu described as the invasion of Hindi by Sanskrit was really not by Sanskrit, but by Bangla.

Indeed, it was the opinion of the true classicists—Srinarain Chaturvedi and Padma Singh Sharma among them—that the Sanskritisation of Hindi was undertaken by people who were unfamiliar with Sanskrit and Hindi, but were in awe of English and "Urdu".

These are not casual voices: these are some of the most powerful, the most vigorous among the makers of modern Hindi, raising their voices against this thoughtless Sanskritisation. Sensitive writers from the earliest days—Balmukund Gupt and, even, Pratap Narain Misra—have simply refused to write this

"Hindi". And yet the tendency has persisted, consolidated, entrenched—so that "Hindi" today is completely different from the language that was practised by the pioneers of the agitation that led to its emergence. If the schoolmasters who are the keepers of the Hindi establishment could be persuaded to attend to something other than the pursuit of official power and patronage, they would find themselves forced to denounce the founding fathers, forced to disown Hindi's brightest and best.

One of the effects of abjuring the words of common, everyday usage is, as it happens, deeply ironic. Thus, one of the fatuous "accusations" that Hindi strove to overcome was the charge of rusticity. This was absurd not only in respect of the social forces, the classes and interests that were driving the demand for Hindi—but much more directly in respect of the language itself. After all, the *Nagari*—script, but also, on some accounts, language—which drove so much of the early agitation is also, *etymologically*, "of the town", the necessary ancestor of urban, urbane Urdu. However, the attempt to shed common usages and overcome the suspicion of rusticity, to wilfully seek to acquire a desperate urbanity, has produced a curious attenuation of the vocabulary. Two scholars who stand at opposite poles of the ideological spectrum—Vidya Niwas Mishra and Namwar Singh—have written eloquently about the inescapable and glorious diversity of Hindi's word-stock.[27] Rahul Sankrityayana has drawn particular attention to the way in which the word-stock evolved by "native users" has been devalued in Khari Boli "Hindi" because of a disavowal of "locality". The deficit has been sought to be made up by a recourse to Sanskrit *tatsamas*. Rahul Sankrityayana is of course concerned about the loss of the cultural heritage that is embodied in that abandoned word-stock. But he is particularly concerned to rectify the inadequacy produced by neglecting the evolved language of vernacular *doing*. He remarks the paucity of *verbs* and draws up a list of trades and crafts whose usages should be drawn upon to enrich this Khari Boli "Hindi": blacksmith, barber, carpenter, ploughman... Not surprisingly, practically all these are *non-savarna*, the rejects of upper-caste Hindu society![28]

For the ideologues, however, while the distance (and difference) from Urdu and even Urdu-ness—*Urdu-pan*, extending to common usages—has to be marked out, a filial relationship with

Sanskrit also has to be established. Obviously, there are problems with this: the relationship with Urdu is embarrassingly manifest, that with Sanskrit is largely mythical. Given the grammatical distance between Hindi and Sanskrit, the only way in which a relationship can be established is through large-scale lexical borrowing, bending the relaxed, loose-limbed grammar of the achieved middle tongue. This results in a consonantal clutter that probably sounds, to a largely semi-literate constituency, Sanskritoid.

It would only be fair to note, however, that in the hands of sensitive and skilled users—Hazari Prasad Dwivedi and Nirala are two names that come to mind—this *synthetic* language is capable of considerable power, drawing upon the technical and philosophical resources of Sanskrit. Indeed, *this* "Hindi" *should* be acknowledged as a remarkable cultural invention. But ironically, it is the Hindi ideologue's own myths of antiquity that prevent such an acknowledgment. It must also be said, though, that in the hands of lesser mortals, the Sanskritic syncopated consonants of "Hindi" produce merely a ritual sound, whose purpose is neither cognition nor communication so much as it is to reassure the flock. I suspect that the strangulated gutturals of Arabicised "Urdu" fulfil a similar function.

I have tried to suggest above, a propos the discussion of 1857 and the "peace" that followed it, that although Urdu and the defence of Urdu, its social bases and its position in the regional power equilibrium, is an important element in the matrix of determinations out of which modern "Hindi" emerges, there is also a limited autonomy, an internal dynamic in the case of both "Hindi" and "Urdu". This, I suggested, is liable to be lost sight of in the point counter-point mode of narration into which the history of Hindi-Urdu in this period inevitably falls. Thus, as I have said above, the Sanskritisation of Hindi and the Persianisation of Urdu—producing, respectively, "Hindi" and "Urdu" from and upon a shared linguistic base—are not exactly parallel processes. At about the time the move to "purify" Hindi and bring it closer to its alleged Sanskrit origin is gaining ground, one may detect signs of an attempt to de-Persianise Urdu. Thus, the poet Josh Malihabadi remembers being admonished by his father because

he, a fledgling poet, was dabbling in Persianisms:

कहते हैं उसे ज़बान-ए-उर्दू
जिसमें ना हो रंग फ़ारसी का[29]
That language is called Urdu which
Has overcome the Persian itch.

In time, of course, the enforced intimacy of modern democratic politics forces the two processes to move more closely in tandem—ironically, in both cases, by turning away from the middle ground towards their lunatic, culturally exclusivist peripheries.

* * *

There is an all-but-forgotten episode in the history of the making of modern "Hindi" that makes it possible to isolate certain recondite aspects of this "relative autonomy". The controversy aroused by the publication of Ayodhya Prasad Khattri's *Khari Boli ka Padya* in 1887 is, at one level, merely an esoteric debate regarding the relative poeticality of two dialects of Hindi—Khari Boli, against the traditional Braj. This contention with Braj is a relatively clean dichotomy—unlike the one with Urdu, which is layered with the sediment of many phases of controversy. (Thus, one may distinguish the script-phase from the open struggle—inside and outside the Council house—for regional dominance in NWP&O, which must in turn be distinguished from the widening and deepening contention at the level of the national struggle against colonial rule.) The Braj Bhasha episode is therefore, for the linguistic historian, a little like the anthropologists' forgotten tribe—a privileged window into past mentalities. Further, despite the acrimony which it generated a hundred years ago, the dispute with Braj has become, what with the shifting alignments we shall have occasion to observe, practically a dispute within the family. It is, by the same token, a good place to study dirty linen.

The start of the Braj episode may be marked with great precision: in 1887, one Ayodhya Prasad Khattri, himself a court official, published at his own expense a volume entitled *Khari Boli ka Padya*. In this work, Ayodhya Prasad Khattri made out a case for the poetical competence of Khari Boli—the dialect that provides the foundation of modern "Hindi". At the time that this claim was

made, the overwhelmingly dominant language (or "dialect") of poetical composition was, in fact Braj. This relatively modest and recondite argument unleashed a storm of controversy. For about three years following the publication of *Khari Boli ka Padya*, Ayodhya Prasad Khattri became a hectic activist in the cause of Khari Boli, ever ready with dossier and argument. Modern Hindi's memory, where it retains any traces of him, remembers the controversy as one regarding literary and more particularly poetic language—i.e. the strenuous demonstration that Khari Boli was fully capable of being a vehicle of poetry. However, the sheer violence of the controversy it generated on all sides indicates clearly that there were other, momentous matters at issue. Years later, in 1904, when Khattri showed up at the *grihapraveshotsava* of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras—the leading institution working in the interest of Khari Boli Hindi at that time—Guleri remembers that Khattri was treated with conspicuous hostility. While "B.A.Pass Babu Shyam Sundar Das", the Nagari Pracharini Sabha busybody, cajoled Guleri to join the group that was being photographed to mark the inauguration, he pointedly ignored Khattri. Eventually, someone noticed the aged crank who was of course the father of it all.[30]

The claim that Khari Boli was preeminently suitable as a vehicle of prose had already been recognised, even by Bharatendu. Thus, the claim for its poetical competence also was far from naive or modest. It was an assertion, soon to be borne out by historical events, that Khari Boli was ready to take over, its time had come. Frederick Pincott's Preface to *Khari Boli ka Padya* makes it quite clear that Khattri's intentions were in fact far from modest:

> His object is to induce his countrymen to abandon the archaic Braj dialect in their poetic effusion, and to persuade those who favour Urdu to use Nagari instead of Arabic letters for their verses. In fact, he proposes a compromise, one party is asked to abandon a cherished dialect of their language and the other party a customary method of writing it.... all parties meet on the common ground of Khari Boli, or correct speech, understood by all, and living, growing and changing with the daily requirements of advancing civilisation.

It is a moving vision—and one that is poignantly at variance not only with the controversy that erupted almost immediately

but also with the escalating violence that was soon to wreck all hope of compromise.

Ayodhya Prasad Khattri distinguished five styles of Khari Boli Hindi. The first of these—*theth* or authentic Hindi—was represented by Inshallah Khan's *Rani Ketaki ki Kahani*; the second, Eurasian, was marked by an apparently farcical admixture of English words—although the example quoted below has a fine contemporary ring to it:

> डार्कनेस छाया हुआ है हिन्द में चारों तरफ़!
> नाम को भी कहीं बाकी न light nowadays!
> Darkness reigns all over Hind!
> There is no light anywhere nowadays!

However, the three styles that bore, so to speak, the crux of Khattri's argument were:

1. the Pandit style, heavily laden with *tatsama* Sanskrit (his examples, incidentally, fall far short of the mature "Pandit style", i.e. modern "Hindi"!);
2. the Maulvi style, a correspondingly grotesque imitation of Arabic and Persian;
3. the style that Khattri himself favoured, the middle or Munshi style.

It is worth noting that Ayodhya Prasad Khattri is in some sense a part of the *same* movement of consciousness as the Malaviya of the *Court Character* memorandum: he too is marked by the restlessness of an imminent modernity. Thus, he favours Khari Boli (in the Munshi style) because of its greater accessibility, its freedom from the inertial weight of an inherited literary tradition and its consequent ability to represent reality without genre-induced distortion. Finally, there is a social-reformist edge to the advocacy of Khari Boli. Just as Malaviya is concerned with more than a mere official acceptance of the Nagari character in Court transactions, so Khattri too, by way of *exempla*, excerpts materials that address the social evils of the time (and not only, be it said, of that time alone), such as caste divisions, and badly arranged marriages, and the condition of widows.

The furious controversy provoked by Khattri's pro-Khari Boli argument appears particularly puzzling in view of subsequent

historical developments that were, in a relatively short period of time, to elevate Khari Boli Hindi to unprecedented levels of national and official legitimacy. But in the late 1880s, barring a few personal friends, there was hardly anyone outside Bihar—with the notable exception of Sridhar Pathak—who received Ayodhya Prasad Khattri's message with any sympathy. Khattri himself was far enough ahead of his time to actually persuade someone to make a selection from *both* sides of the controversy, and published that too at his own expense. But by 1890 he was a broken man. He had suffered financial loss of course—but worse, his cause appeared to have been defeated. In the lull between Hunter and MacDonnell, so to speak, he was no longer even controversial.

For the next ten years, he gave up all literary activity. He resumed it only in 1901, but by that time, and on the quiet as it were, the battle was already won. Khattri died in 1905. And what is remarkable in the career of this extraordinary man is not so much the unfulfilled desires—all lives must end with those—but rather, the surprising and ironic *fulfillment* of his desires. After all, it was a *kind* of Khari Boli that rose and rose after about 1900.

In puzzling over the hostility that Khattri provoked, I have identified two moves that proved fatal. The first was to argue that Braj and Khari Boli Hindi were distinct languages, not only at the level of poetic tradition but also grammatically. The second was to argue that Urdu was merely a "style" of Khari Boli. In a word, a contemporary supporter wrote, Khattri was suggesting that while there was a radical discontinuity between Braj and Khari Boli, there was a basic continuity (and affinity) between Khari Boli and Urdu:

> यह कौन कहता है कि उर्दू कोई दूसरी वस्तु है? सच पूछो तो उर्दू हिन्दी का एक रूपान्तर है... जब हम हिन्दुओं ने इसका अनादर कर इसे त्याग दिया तब मुसलमानों ने इसकी दीनता पर दया करके इसे अपने मुल्क का लिबास और जेवरों से आभूषित कर इसका दूसरा नाम उर्दू रखा। तात्पर्य यह कि इस नारी का कुल और गोत्र सदा एक ही रहा, समय-समय पर इसका रंग-रूप और भेष अलबत्ता पलटता गया।[31]
>
> Who says that Urdu is anything different? In truth, Urdu is but another form of Hindi... When we Hindus did not honour it sufficiently and neglected it, the Muslims took pity on her pathetic condition and dressed it in the garments and the ornaments of their own land, and gave her the name of Urdu. This leads to the conclusion that the lady has always stayed loyal to the traditional family and clan, even though, from time to time, she has appeared in different guises.

One of the early grammarians of Hindi, Kamta Prasad Guru, also described Khari Boli precisely in terms of its *nearness* to Urdu: he called it *thaarh boli* or Turki![32] ("thaarh" is of course "standing up" or, in one of its senses, see below, "khari".) The Kannadiga President of the Rashtrabhasha Parishad, one of official Hindi's apex institutions, was evidently unfamiliar with the vicious local politics out of which modern "Hindi" had emerged when he informed the learned gathering at the annual convention in 1950 that down where he came from, the terms Hindi and *rashtrabhasha* were unknown in the early part of the twentieth century, but the language designated by those terms was sometimes called "Mussulmani"![33]

Khattri fancied himself as something of a linguist. Thus, when he found that the name of Bharatendu was constantly invoked in support of Braj, as against the alleged inadequacy of Khari Boli, he was forced to protest that "Bharatendu was not God, and that he knew nothing of philology..." The fact is that Bharatendu was an extremely sensitive and sophisticated observer of actual language use. He was also, as he declared before the Hunter Commission, a poet in three languages. And when he declared that Khari Boli Hindi was too stiff and, well, too *prosaic* to be a suitable vehicle for poetry, he knew what he was talking about. It took several generations of heroic innovators—Nirala, Agyeya, Raghuvir Sahay...—to make Khari Boli poetry not sound like a contradiction in terms. But be that as it may, it is evident that Khattri himself knew nothing of politics. Because his linguistic claim on behalf of Khari Boli and its fundamental affinity with Urdu, was in fact being made in the context of the *Court Character* controversy. The sharpening Nagari-Persian controversy rapidly, and it appears *ineluctably*, mutated into a Hindi-Urdu and then a Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.

There were, as we have seen, powerful mutually reinforcing factors conducing towards this rupture—the economic stagnation,

the declining opportunities, the waves of the newly-educated breaking against the unrelenting wall of traditional inequality which, in the eyes of the Hindu provincial intelligentsia, merely served to protect the privileged position of the largely Muslim landed elite. And therefore, although Ayodhya Prasad Khattri's passionate intervention was sincere and well-intentioned as well as being linguistically sound, it was evidently insufficient to stem the tide—or, reversing the metaphor, to resist the undertow towards 1947 and Partition. Or, what is perhaps more immediately relevant in this particular case, the movement towards the crystallisation, consolidation and then empowerment of a particular *variant* of his beloved Khari Boli.

* * *

One of the reasons why Braj had been defended so tenaciously in the first phase of the struggle was precisely because of its perceived *distance* from Urdu. It was seen as a sort of enclave against the contamination of Urdu and its poetic tradition. By an extension soon to become familiar, it was also a refuge against the seduction/corruption of Islam. The poetic tradition of Braj, replete with Krishna-bhakti and the amorous exploits of the dark god, was believed to provide an adequate and rival attraction. Braj was thus, clearly, the vehicle of a proto-communal identity. Khattri's Khari Boli, *cognate of Urdu*, deliberately distinguishing itself from Braj, could *not* become a vehicle of *that* emergent identity.

It is not surprising, then, to find that the story of the *triumph* of Khari Boli so soon after the hostility aroused by Ayodhya Prasad Khattri's claim on its behalf *conceals a fundamental transformation of Khari Boli itself*. Thus, it isn't merely that the *external* situation of Khari Boli changes during these years—the MacDonnell moment, as it were. Its nature *itself* suffers a radical transformation. The coming together of the new identity and the language is fateful. The modest and culturally defensive sentiments that had found a home in Braj could find another, more powerful, assertive voice, in a suitably modified version of the same Khari Boli that was, until so recently, an enemy.

The key to this puzzle lies, of course, in the specific character of the "variant" Khari Boli "Hindi" that was developed. Khattri was

accused of being insensitive to the fact that if the Hindi-wallahs were actually to use the "people's Hindi" that they spoke so affectingly about, it would be indistinguishable from Urdu—and wouldn't the cultural pride of Kashi, where the Nagari Pracharini Sabha was situated, take a beating then?[34] A Braj activist, campaigning against Khattri's Khari Boli, wrote to *Hindustan* on 15 January 1888:

> यदि खड़ी बोली की कविता की चेष्टा की जाए तो फिर खड़ी बोली के स्थान में थोड़े दिन में ख़ाली उर्दू की कविता का प्रचार हो जाए।[35]
> If poetry were to be written in (this) Khari Boli, then in a short while Urdu poetry will be everywhere in place of Khari Boli.]

On his part Sridhar Pathak, Khattri's Sanskrit-inclining Sancho Panza, asserted that Urdu would *not* be allowed to contaminate Khari Boli Hindi. He called for eternal vigilance, so to speak:

> जब हम हिन्दी की प्रतिष्ठा के परिरक्षण में सदा सचेत रहेंगे तो उर्दू का ताव क्या जो चौखट के भीतर पाँव रख दे।[36]
> When we are forever vigilant in defence of Hindi's honour, then how will Urdu have the daring to so much as step inside the threshold?

We shall return to the inevitable anxiety attendant on this kind of policing.

It is notable that in 1911, at the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Khari Boli was hailed by precisely those people who had been on the side of Braj at the time of the Ayodhya Prasad Khattri controversy. One anonymous bard recognised the inevitability of Khari Boli's triumph in an interesting variant of modern railway metaphor:

> देख रेल का सिग्नल तुम किस कारण झुक जाते हो।
> संसारी जीवों को इससे क्या तुम कुछ सिखलाते हो?[37]
> Seeing the oncoming train, O signal, why do you promptly go down?
> Do you seek thus to teach us worldly folk some lesson?

Pratap Narain Misra, who had been firmly on the side of Braj in the earlier controversy, recognised that the future belonged to Khari Boli. And it was in favour of Khari Boli that he issued his famous call to, well, not quite arms, but certainly slogans:

चहुँहुँ जुसाँचो निज कल्यान
तो सब मिलि भारत सन्तान!
जपो निरन्तर एक जबान
हिन्दी, हिन्दू, हिन्दुस्तान।
If your well-being you really want,
O children of Bharat!
Then chant forever but these words—
Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan!

But, even as one sees the process by which, progressively, Khari Boli becomes "communalised", one cannot help deriving a certain relish from the fact that the mischievous genius of poetry compels Misra, in this key utterance on language and its role in communal mobilisation and consolidation, to use the Arabo-Persian *zabaan* rather than its Sanskrit equivalent *bhasha*!

* * *

The paradox of the struggle between Khari Boli and Braj—and Khari Boli's eventual triumph—has an interesting repercussion on the question of the *avowed tradition* of modern Hindi. As is well known, one of the charges against Khari Boli Hindi—deployed, most notably, by the proponents of Urdu—was that Khari Boli Hindi was only a language of shopkeepers etc., and that it lacked a literary tradition. However, during the time when Khari Boli was trying to establish an *independent* identity for itself, it could scarcely claim Braj—a centuries-old literary language—as part of its heritage. Thus, in 1912 Babu Shyam Sunder Das actually represented to the Education Department that Braj should be *removed* from Hindi text-books. Braj Bhasha, and the Braj Bhasha tradition, was condemned in the harshest possible terms: at a meeting of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Allahabad, Maithili Sharan Gupt declared that those people who still hankered after poetry in Braj Bhasha were, "in truth... sworn enemies of our national language."[38] It was only later, after it had acquired a certain measure of confidence, that Khari Boli Hindi could stake a claim to the rich literature in Braj and the other "dialects" as its "tradition". Thus, in his Presidential Address to the Braj Sahitya Mandal in Hathras on 4 April 1952, Seth Govind Das could

generously say: [39]

ब्रज साहित्य राष्ट्रभाषा हिन्दी का प्राण है... ब्रजभाषा के गहन अध्ययन बिना, हिन्दी का पूर्ण ज्ञान होना असंभव है; अत: ब्रजभाषा अब भी भूत की वस्तु नहीं, वरन् भारत के सक्रिय और आशापूर्ण भविष्य की अनिवार्य वस्तु है।
Braj literature is the very life's breath of Hindi... Without a deep study of Braj Bhasha, it is impossible to know Hindi fully. Therefore Braj Bhasha is even today not something that belongs to the past, but is essential to Bharat's dynamic and hopeful future!

For Rambilas Sharma, some years after this, Braj has become representative of the creative tendency towards *tadbhavta*, which, he warns, Hindi-wallahs can forswear in favour of Sanskrit pedigree only at the risk of losing linguistic vitality. Braj no longer stands for the decadent and excessively refined and even effete feudal past that Dwivedi and others were so keen to escape from.[40] Nor indeed for the "rusticity" that it was accused of in an 1888 editorial, during the height of the Khattri controversy:

...ब्रजभाषा अधिकतर अनपढ़-गँवार ही बोलने में लाते हैं, पर खड़ी हिन्दी सुशिक्षितों के बोलने और लिखने दोनों में आती है।[41]
Braj Bhasha is used mainly by illiterate rustics, but Khari Hindi is used by the well-educated both for speaking and writing.

The argument, need I say, is a reprise of the accusation that Urdu ideologues were making against Hindi! But for Sharma and others, now, Braj Bhasha stands for rural vitality, for roots—it represents the future, not the past! This claim of the value of rustic vitality indicates that we are in the different phase from the earlier struggle. *Then* Hindi was keen to acquire the accoutrements of urbanity and shed its earthy affiliations.

It has been remarked, apropos the early period of the struggle, that Hindi expanded as one went into the "glorious" past, but contracted as it approached the contentious present.[42] As we have seen, the actual politics of tradition is a little more nuanced. Braj Bhasha is both excluded and, later, *included*. Indeed, *excluded* because it is tied up with a powerful *riti-kavya* tradition, and then *included* because of that same tradition! The next logical step, of course, would be for Hindi to lay a claim to what is, *arguably*, the

richest part of its tradition—namely, Urdu—but such a development lies beyond the bounds of present political possibility. But in 1955, Sampurnanand of all people made a plea for admitting Urdu literature as a valuable part of "our *vangmaya*"—but also noted delicately that echoes of the old Hindi/Urdu contention—in which he himself had played a significant part—were still around.[43]

6

Hindi Nationalism

The process of the making of modern "Hindi" and the making of "the Hindu community" are related in complex ways. This is not to suggest that I have found in "Hindi" the master-key to the pan-Indian phenomenon of "Hindutva" in this century. Still, "Hindi" offers some valuable insights into the wider phenomenon. One of the hazards of this "emblematic" status, however, is that it is something of an effort even to isolate the narrower linguistic phenomena. It is here that the relatively minor Braj Bhasha/Khari Boli controversy offers, as we have seen, a privileged insight into processes that are otherwise clouded by anger and special pleading—precisely because it has been forgotten, lain in one corner away from the heat and dust of present controversy.

The remarkable transformations that the epithet *khari* in the name Khari Boli Hindi underwent in the process of defining itself against Braj Bhasha indicate something of the complex forces that were at play. Thus, on one account, Khari Boli was contrasted with the mellifluousness and soft fluency of Braj Bhasha: *khari* was understood to refer to the rustic and stiff uncouthness of Khari Boli. (The protagonists of Khari Boli returned the compliment: Braj Bhasha was called *pari* boli—i.e. supine!) To yet another ideologue, pushing a different agenda, *khari* meant "pure and unadulterated" (the standard adjective, incidentally, for good *desi* ghee!), as distinguished from those common tongues that had formed through the promiscuity of social intercourse.

The question of masculinity and femininity too is implicated in the ways in which this *khari* was glossed. Thus, one of the accusations against Braj Bhasha was that it was effete, passive and unmanly—or somewhat, confusingly, that it was an old woman, with a taste for unbecoming ornamentation. There are several difficult binaries at play here. Along with the masculine/feminine, there is also young/old along with the always implicit good/bad. And old is to young what feminine is to masculine and what bad is to good. Except of course when the young/old binary is mapped onto the second wife/first wife—as happens in the contrast with Urdu!

For there are echoes here of the contention with Urdu as well. Thus in that zone of controversy, not only was Hindi insistently described as the loyal eldest daughter of the divinely perfect Sanskrit, it was also, repeatedly, the good, faithful *but unglamorous* first wife, as against Urdu the mincing courtesan, the brazen harlot Urdu! The following lines from Sohan Prasad's 1886 "Hindi Urdu ki Larai" are fairly typical:

पतिव्रता गुन यह नहीं सुन तू वेश्या वाम।
छन छन करे सिंगार जो सो हरजाई नार।
पतिव्रता गुन यह नहीं देखहु हृदय विचार।।
This is not fit conduct for a decent married woman, you harlot, you!
She who is forever bedecking herself is but a prostitute...
Consider well, such is not the conduct of a loyal wife...

Then says Hindi of its own sober self:

कभी न बदलों रूप रंग सादी सीधी चाल...
अभी काल की छोकरी करो बराबरी मोर।
हम से मत बड़ि बात का तोर मोर बड बीच।
गाल फारि मुँह मारि के लैहों जिह्वा खींच।।
Always simply got up I am, I never change my form...
And you, you little chit of a girl, do you seek to match me now...
Bandy not words with me, you, there is a gulf between us—
I will slash your cheeks and smash your face, and tear your tongue out!

Bharatendu had called Urdu, a language in which he boasted of writing poetry under the *nom de plume* "Rasa", "the language of dancing girls and prostitutes."[1] Seguing into its cognate binary in this smooth metaphorical world, Urdu became (also) the language of male licentiousness, as against Hindi's high-minded virtuousness. By a further process of transformation, Urdu, which then stood for rampant, uncontrolled maleness, gradually became the used-up, spent language of male excess, rendered limp and unvigorous, by its promiscuity.

It was against this elective background, comprising Urdu *and* Braj Bhasha, that modern Khari Boli "Hindi" defined its own sexual identity. Also significant was the fact that, at least till the turn of the century, Urdu was overwhelmingly the language of public (and of course male) discourse, while Hindi was used by Hindu women.[2] An angry Bharatendu had told the Hunter Commission that "although the Lal Sahab [i.e. Kayasth] will correspond with the Sayyid Sahab Bahadur in Urdu, yet when writing to his wife he must use the Hindi character."[3] Shyam Sundar Das complained of the Kayastha Conference of 1894, that while the Kayasthas had given formal support to the Nagari/Hindi demand, it was only among "the female society of Kayasths and Kashmiris" that Hindi was received with any enthusiasm.[4] It was against this legacy of feminine association that Khari Boli Hindi was also glossed in overtly phallic terms as manly, aggressive, erect![5]

* * *

Following his own well-known predispositions, Ram Bilas Sharma has argued that Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi's *Sampattishastra* (Dwivedi's critique of the institution of private property) is the key text for understanding the radical element in "Hindi"'s founding ideology.[6] There is a measure of truth in Sharma's argument. No one who actually reads the people who have acquired posthumous conservative and even reactionary reputations—Malaviya, Pratap Narain Misra, Dwivedi—can miss the radical energy of their dissatisfaction with the status quo, their reformist zeal, their ambition to be "modern".

Bharatendu Harishchandra is perhaps the most fitting symbol of the radical social imagination that underlay and was enabled

by Hindi before it became "Hindi". In him, Hindi is the tool and symbol of social transformation in the interests of the common people. Consider the classic occasion: in November 1884, when Harishchandra was invited to Ballia on the occasion of the annual Dadri Mela. He addressed a gathering that included, apart from the other local notables, the British Collector of the district, D.T. Roberts. What Roberts made of the occasion is not known, but the address itself has acquired an iconic significance in modern Hindi's memory.

Harischandra, a young man of thirty-four, albeit barely one year from his death, chose to ignore the assembled elite and addressed what must then have been a hypothetical or "virtual" community—the still-to-emerge middle class which alone could be interested in Harischandra's question: *Bharatvars ki unnati kaise ho sakti hai*? The real audience was identified with a surprising arrogance—*ham garib gande kale admi*, us poor dirty black people, not Collector Roberts.* All the themes of Harischandra's busy life are here, the sense of being on the threshold of a new age which demanded a class that would prepare the ground for it; the non-defensive, relaxed cultural pride; the belief that the only future worth working for was one which *included everyone*—an assertion which, given the time, must be addressed as much to the resurgent Hindu communities eager to exclude "aliens" as to the Muslim elite of the heartland, zamindars who were scarcely accustomed to thinking of their *praja*, Hindu *and* Muslim, as fellow-humans; the advocacy of education; then, suddenly and somewhat problematically, the imperative necessity of developing and working for (and through) the people's language, Hindi. (It is worth noting, nevertheless, that this language is, in fact, *not* named by Bharatendu!) He linked his case for adoption and propagation of the people's language to a more comprehensive theory of self-reliance and brought into the ambit of his discourse matters relating to the colonial economy—the "drain of wealth"—as well as the

*It is difficult not to sense, in the confidence of this address, something of the truth of the contemporary observation a propos Harischandra—that but for the fact that he had had the barest minimum of formal education, he might have become only "a half-educated Dy. Magistrate or a briefless Vakil," indistinguishable from the Babus about whom Lytton remarked that they "represent nothing but the social anomaly of their position." [Cited Dalmia (1997). p 31]

catastrophic situation with respect to employment. He spoke about reforming degenerate social practices—such as the ban on widow remarriage and the overall discrimination against women, about the injustices of the caste system, and about the matters that divided the native population into suspicious, antagonistic communities.

Of course, the late nineteenth century utopian imagination is historically marked—and it is possible to make a selective reading of Bharatendu Harishchandra in which he is made to appear as some kind of Hindu reactionary. What a close reading reveals, however, is a democratic stirring, an eagerness to confront the evils of contemporary society—poverty, backwardness, sectarian bigotry—and a desire to harness the energies of the people in order to build what can only be an indigenous modernity. It is not merely that Bharatendu Harishchandra *shares* some opinions with others who were also, around that time, imagining a future that was not merely an extension of the present—e.g. a concern with the "drain of wealth" or the status of women. But what is significant is the implicit model of transformation which is democratic rather than paternalistic: the contrast with the nearly contemporary Indian National Congress is palpable. It is a little difficult to illustrate this merely at the level of opinions—which were becoming part of the climate of enlightened opinion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Bharatendu Harishchandra's lasting legacy is a tone of voice: Bharatendu's *mukri*, after Amir Khusro, is a good example of his command over the succinctly subversive power of the vernacular:

भीतर-भीतर सब रस चूसे, हँसि-हँसि के तन मन धन मूसे।
जाहिर बातन में अति तेज, क्यों सखी साजन, नहिं अंग्रेज।।[7]
Guess what it is that, even as it smiles at you,
Deprives you of all your substance—
Adept in all the worldly arts—
No, not a lover, it's the Brits!

He has a brisk confidence in the capacities of ordinary people, if only they can be freed from the tyrannies that hold them down. Of course, these "tyrannies" do not encompass, as yet, the tyranny of colonialism itself—this is very much "anti-colonialism before the fact" as it were.[8] But Bharatendu Harishchandra has a sharp understanding of the concomitant cultural superstructures of

colonialism, and the daring to imagine, and recommend, and work for, their demise.

* * *

But just as the original radical impulse is real, so is the choking of this impulse, its being subsumed in a fundamental conservatism that is today one of "Hindi"s characteristic features. Irrespective of whether or not it originated with them, the politics of the "Hindi" demand soon became implicated, for logistical and other reasons, with the Hindu commercial classes that had accumulated wealth in the decades before and after 1857. These were the people who manned and financed the *sabhas* and *sammelans*. It is a significant fact that Calcutta—home of the earliest Hindi periodicals—and the Calcutta Marwaris are so prominent in the making of modern "Hindi". It would be reasonable to expect that gradually the nature of this support began to exert pressure on "the limits as well as the normative themes" of the "Hindi" movement itself.[9] Thus, for Gauri Datt, author of *Hindi-Urdu ki Larai* (1886), there is no contradiction between pleading for Nagari/Hindi in the name of the common people, but retaining the conviction that Hindu princelings will intervene to further this democratic agenda:

मोहि पूर्ण विश्वास है जो दस-बीस नरेस।
एकमत होई उबारहिं हिन्दी गाय वो देस।।
Full faith have I that ten-twenty kings,
Will band together and save Hindi, cow and the country...

The fundamental conservatism of the *mahajani* classes, as well as their need to evolve a new language of status—in addition to the sensibilities and proclivities of the newly-educated *savarna* intelligentsia that we have encountered already—are an important determinant of the complex cultural formation that is indexed by the name "Hindi". After all, as Bayly coolly points out, "despite his misgivings about `capitalists', Malaviya ... began with the Allahabad Tandons and ended with the Birlas." [10]

What substitutes for the lost radical energy is a kind of high-minded *moralism*. Of course, like all real phenomena, this one too must be over-determined, deriving not only from the sanctimoniousness of the *mahajani* patrons but also from the contrastive realtionship with the Urdu-Muslim world of

aristocratic indulgence—and even, at a purely literary level, with the erotic *riti-kavya* that is Braj Bhasha's dominant mode. This is how Shyam Sundar Das describes the high mission of Khari Boli Hindi poetry:

उसका काम है पथ भ्रष्ट को मार्ग बताना, आलसी में उत्साह भरना, पद-दलित को पूर्व सुनाना और मुर्दे को ज़िंदा बनाना।[11]
It's very purpose is to guide onto the right path all those are lost, to fill the lethargic with energy, to tell those who are ground under, tales of past glory, and so bring the dead back to life.

* * *

Sumitranandan Pant's Preface to his 1926 collection of verse, *Pallava*, is a key document of this formation. There we find, not surprisingly, a marked tension between acknowledging the attractions and achievements of Braj Bhasha, while at the same time asserting, in uncompromising terms, that it is time for a change. Braj Bhasha, often rendered as an old woman, is here transformed into a delicate mother, from whose womb the vigorous—*ojasvini*—daughter Khari Boli Hindi has been born. (Inaccurate linguistics, but that's not the point!) Scorn is poured on the Braj Bhasha tradition's insatiable erotic obsession, the relentless fascination with the female body: when asked to render other *rasas*, like *vira-rasa*, i.e. valour, or *raudra* i.e. rage, the poet complains, Braj Bhasha can only stammer fearfully. It can only bleat on about Krishna's flute, but the need of the hour is to pick up the *panchjanya*, the conch of war, because the nation is awake and evidently eager for battle. (The key journal of the RSS is also called *Panchjanya*!) Thus, Pant's "Hindi" develops *also* as Braj's "Other". It is moralistic as against Braj's characteristic erotic mode, engaged and nationalist as against Braj's traditional quietist and apolitical stance.

The novelty of the new age demands that it be freed from the constraints of Braj Bhasha—cast off its soft and delicate fabrics, though the only available alternatives are coarse and home-spun, like *khadi*. For sheer emphasis, Pant takes recourse to English:

यह बिल्कुल आउट ऑफ डेट हो गयी है!
This has become entirely out of date!

Clearly, there is much more than *language* at stake in the matter of modern "Hindi". Put down at every step by the arrogant Avadh elite, the bearers of modern "Hindi" were practically forced to invent ("forge") a style, a culture, a new form of consciousness. It is not possible, in this tract, to do more than indicate some features of this cultural formation. If one looks back, from the perspective of the degraded present in which "Hindi" has become just another vested interest, at the tremendous outpouring of writing, the efflorescence of journalism, the great journals that were brought out by the pioneers, it seems scarcely credible now. [12] Going through the pages of a journal like *Saraswati*, which was started almost simultaneously with the promulgation of MacDonnell's order, one notices an omnivorous ambition, an intellectual eagerness that aspires to encompass the world, which is light-years removed from today's *rashtrabhasha* Hindi, sulking in a provincial corner, begging for scraps.

Excluded from the salons of the powerful, the "Hindi" elite was forced to invent an alternative cultural package: a style, a sensibility. The linguistic part of this invention has sometimes been acknowledged, if only indirectly. Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi, *Saraswati*'s most famous editor, and the person whose name identifies this formative period of modern "Hindi"—Dwivedi Yuga— even boasted that he had taught the greats how to write:

> ...देखने से पता लगेगा कि आजकल की हिन्दी के अनेक धुरन्धर लेखक किस तरह राह पर लाए गए थे।[13]
>
> He who seeks to know can find out how the great Hindi writers of today wer brought in line...

The sound-universe of early Khari Boli Hindi poetry is, it is not often realised, a powerful cultural invention. It has no antecedents in the language itself, but appears to be a bold appropriation of the dense, clustered consonants, the heavy, stately sonority of Sanskrit. Skilled users are able to play the range from tatsama-Sanskrit to deshaja-tadbhava, combining classical *gravitas* with elements that are colloquial, fluid and resonant.

Obviously, this involved a conscious turning away from, a certain wariness in respect of, the linguistic resources which had evolved over the centuries—probably because those had been

taken over by—and indeed *become*—Urdu. But for all the evident loss, *there is a gain also*. Thus, at its finest, modern Hindi is able to articulate a new social and historical awareness, a civilisational pain that appears inaccessible from within the more established traditions.

It is a matter of detail that the early poetry, in particular, frequently has a doughy, prosaic quality—for example, in Sridhar Pathak and even Maithili Sharan Gupt. One must acknowledge nevertheless a kind of brave straining after poetic afflatus, a futile yearning for eloquence. Still, the project has a certain stubborn grandeur about it. It is also perhaps the necessary precursor of those creative breakthroughs which we recognise in, say, Nirala and Mahadevi. Returning briefly to Pant's *Preface*, one can hardly miss the desperate need to clear some *imaginative* space—and not merely space in government offices, as it were—where a new content and a new reality might find expression. Braj Bhasha is too constricted, he writes—the vehicle of modernity cannot enter its narrow blind alleys. But Khari Boli Hindi, on the other hand, is completely different:

> उसमें वर्तमान के पद-चिन्ह, भूत की चेतावनी, भविष्य की आशा, अथच नवीन युग की नवीन दृष्टि का समावेश है। उसमें नए कटाक्ष, नए रोमांच, नए स्वप्न, नया हास, नया रुदन, नया हृत्कम्पन, नवीन वसंत, नवीन कोकिलाओं का गान है!
>
> In it are the footprints of the present, warnings from the past, hope of the future, a compendium of new creation for a new age. In it there are new suggestions, new sensations, new dreams, new laughter, new tears, new delights—in it are the new cuckoos for a new spring!

It seems like a comedown when Pant declares:

> हमें भाषा नहीं, राष्ट्रभाषा की आवश्यकता है, पुस्तकों की नहीं, मनुष्यों की भाषा...
>
> We need not merely a language, but a national language—and a language not of books, but of living people...

(For the record, Pant later confessed [14] that he was "asked" to do Braj Bhasha in. By whom?—the record is silent.) Sadly, of course, such absolute "newness" is never possible, and the *products* of this

process of cultural invention, this lust for novelty, are inevitably marked by the history, and the anxieties, that were attendant at the birth and alas, given the nature of language, thereafter too.

There is, predictably, the anxiety about policing the boundaries. Someone had even asked Sridhar Pathak, when he declared that no word of dubious (Urdu) origin would be allowed, as it were, to cross the threshold, whether some sort of legislative Act was being contemplated against these surreptitious transgressors?[15] Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the courageous Hindi editor who was soon to be murdered in the Kanpur riots of 1931 drew an explicit analogy between language and the physical boundaries of the nation—and declared that defending the linguistic boundaries was by far the more important.[16]

This is how Sridhar Pathak visualised the maintenance, so to speak, of the garden of Khari Boli Hindi:

> जब तक किसी उद्यान का प्रत्येक वीरुध, प्रत्येक पौधा, प्रत्येक गुल्म, प्रत्येक लता, प्रत्येक रौस, प्रत्येक क्यारी, प्रत्येक फल, प्रत्येक फूल सुचतुर माली के निरन्तर निरीक्षण में रहता है तब तक उसकी स्थिति रमणीय रहती है; निरीक्षण में शिथिलता आते ही दशा बिगड़ जाती है।[17]
>
> A garden remains attractive only so long as every plant, every bud, every creeper, every shrub, every bed, every fruit, every flower is under the constant supervision of a vigilant gardener. A little slackness in vigilance, and the situation deteriorates...

It would be a wonder, indeed, if anything survived in a garden that was as aggressively tended as all that!

* * *

My account of the making of "Hindi" from Hindi is, in the main, a narrative of *intimate destabilisation and dispossession*. This derives, at the most general level, from the nature of language itself, from the fact that *it* is such an intimate possession, something that one possesses in the same measure that one is possessed by it. Language is bound up with the foundations of one's being, with memories and emotions, with the subtle structures of the worlds in which one lives. To be rendered vulnerable at *that* level is a heavy price

to pay for an alternative linguistic and cultural identity. But language is nevertheless, because of its inalienable privacy, an ideal vehicle for identity politics, for such intimate possession and dispossession. As desperate states have been forced to realize again and again, the struggle for language can be carried out in the depths of one's being, and can therefore never really be suppressed.

But this inalienably private thing is also ineluctably public. It is always available, surreptitiously as well as in the open, to signal and create affinity, bonding, community. It is not surprising therefore to discover that languages have always played such a key role in identity politics. We have seen that Braj Bhasha, heavy with tradition, rendered soft and pliable by the usages of time, was unsuitable for becoming a vehicle of identity politics for the emergent Hindu-savarna middle class. But in Khari Boli "Hindi", the class and the vehicle had found a perfect complementarity. It therefore comes as no surprise, for instance, to discover that one of the accusations that Nathuram Godse, Gandhi's Maharashtrian assassin brought against the man he had slain was precisely that Gandhi had been opposed to Sanskritised "Hindi".[18]

However, interesting things happen when a *shared* linguistic domain like Hindi-Urdu is made a site for identity politics. (The fate of Serbo-Croatian in the context of the recent ravages might offer interesting comparisons.) As we have seen already, this people's Hindi is truly a middle language, the easy-going vernacular of north India, born out of the necessities of intercourse between different peoples, communities and cultures, which were forced to rub together in the daily business of living, over centuries. Like all real languages, it is a complex system of overlapping registers and dialects. This is a genuinely secular creation, not only in the sense that it is mundane in its origins and purposes but also in the sense of its being poly-communal as well as multi-lingual in its sources. For such a shared linguistic domain and inheritance to become a site of communal differentiation and identity politics produces surprising kinds of violence, even linguistic violence.

The democratic legitimacy of the fractious factions, inevitably derives from their claim to the common language. In our case too, each side claimed—as indeed, it had to—that the *other* was different, and therefore distant from the language of the common

people. But the only practical recourse available to these contentious sharers of the common language was in fact to *make themselves* different—and to *forget* that they have done so, and must continue to do so. Thus, the Nagari/Hindi elite sought to identify the language of the Avadh elite—variously, Urdu or Hindustani—with the Perso-Arabic lunatic fringe. The Urdu side, in turn, sought to identify Hindi with the "Hindi" of the Sanskritising lunatic fringe.

However, each side, in order to strengthen and make good on its claim of democratic legitimacy, was also forced not only to gesture towards the *possible* popular constituency of the future, but also to generate and crystallise an immediately *available* constituency with which to go into battle. Each side was thus forced to move away from the shared middle ground of the common language, and to cobble together a symbology and an imaginary that could sustain the necessary cultural exclusivism with which to generate the battalions—Hindu myths about "the Muslims", Muslim myths about "the Hindus", with their appropriate linguistic analogues. The point to note in all this is that each side is forced to deny what both sides know—and need to know—is the truth: that the common people have, over the centuries, evolved a rich and varied and *shared* language. If there weren't *one* language at the heart of the conflict, there would *be* no problem, no need for strenuous differentiation in the first place.

"Hindi" (also "Urdu", though that is not my immediate concern) had, perforce to distance itself from the common shared domain—and so produce a language that was drained of local colour and fragrance, deprived of emotional warmth and resonance. If this struggle had remained confined to the original level of the script—though it is difficult to imagine how it *could* have—it would have consisted only in gaining official recognition for a "difference" that was non-negotiable and non-compoundable of course, but which was also, reassuringly, *out there*. But when one moves to the level of language proper, *and this is crucial*, the boundary between Hindi and Urdu is inevitably porous. It is infinitely, endlessly negotiable, not only in the public space but in the privacy of one's mind. Here is a wound that can (and must) always be kept green, a trauma that can be inflamed at will—an offence that can be renewed without fear of interdiction. This makes

language—and particularly a language system like Hindi-Urdu—an almost ideal vehicle for a vicious identity politics. The "enemy" is not merely within—he is, with a dangerously convenient economy, oneself![19]

But the perpetrators of this imaginative strategy are also, in an unmistakable sense, its victims. Their relationship to their own language—our relationship with our own language, our children's relationship with their own language—must, ineluctably, be marked by a crippling anxiety, a perpetual fear of transgression, of lapsing from an impossible, inhuman standard. There is also, of course, the related capacity to cause offence, merely by opening one's mouth and violating that which one knows the other values, but this capacity to cause offence is directly predicated on one's *own* vulnerability.

The consequences of this "anxiety" are all around us: there is the universal dread of "school Hindi", in school and out of it. The large numbers of students who fail in Hindi in the Hindi belt itself are grim testimony to the fact that "Hindi" has robbed them of their mother tongue. From being native users, free to invent and be creative, they have been "second-languaged", disabled, rendered alien.[20] Then again, there is the accretion of power in official "Hindi": it has become a kind of poor man's "English", the language of social access and upward mobility.[21] "Dialect" users are under pressure to acquire this official, officials' "Hindi", despite the efforts of enlightened educators to preserve and encourage linguistic diversity. It is the so-called "tribal" in Bastar who demands that he be taught an alien "Hindi" because for him knowing "Hindi" is correlated with power, with the ability to survive and resist the official apparatus which is otherwise manipulated to the manifest disadvantage of people like himself.[22] All this is, of course, a far cry from the democratic rhetoric of the pioneers. But perhaps the saddest consequence of the pedagogic currency of this "Hindi" is the universal timidity, the sterility of thought and expression, the decline of eloquence.

7

Roads to the Present

There was widespread support for the idea of *a* single national language during the freedom movement—perhaps there still is.[1] In some sense, the idea that there should be a national language —like a national literature and, why not, a national bird—is almost as old as the idea of modern nationhood itself. Of course there are modern nations with more than one language, or borrowed ones, or both—but none of this vitiates the claim that modern nationality is drawn powerfully towards the idea of a single national language. Language is central to the romantic-ethnic nationalism associated with the name of Herder—as distinct from the traditional political-geographical idea of nationalism. Thus, he was voicing a consensus when Gaurishankar Hirachandra Ojha declared in 1926:

> इसमें तो किसी को संदेह हो ही नहीं सकता कि हमारा एक राष्ट्र हो, हमारी एक राष्ट्रभाषा हो, और हमारी एक राष्ट्रलिपि हो।[2]
>
> No one can possibly doubt that we should have one nation, one national language, and one national script...

And if there was to be a national language, it could hardly be English. This was partly of course due to reasons of prestige, significantly bruised by the colonial encounter. But there are good pragmatic reasons also. As Gandhi said repeatedly, "if swarajya was not be to be only for the English-educated, if it was to have any meaning for the millions who are hungry and illiterate, for

women and the oppressed untouchable castes, then Hindi alone could be the national language."[3] After all, sentimentality apart, modern nationhood derives its legitimacy from democracy, from the participative citizenship of its constituents. If there was any *one* language that could enable this, it was Hindi. Hindi, it was hoped, was what would bind this nation of differences into one whole:

> आज एक बलवान केन्द्रीय शासन के सिवा हमें एकता में बाँधने वाली क्या चीज़ है? धर्म में शक्ति नहीं, वह चीज़ राष्ट्रभाषा ही हो सकती है।[4]
>
> Other than a strong central administration, what is there that binds us together? Religion does not have the requisite power—a national language alone can do that.

Hindi was the language in which the citizens of the future nation could speak to each other—with self-respect—and indeed, *be spoken to* by the State that would govern their nation. Hindi would be the language of inter-regional communication. *Of course, when the time came, there was some little argument about what exactly this Hindi was...*

* * *

ITEM: Reminiscing about his early years in rural Karnataka, B.V.Karanth writes:

> I learned to play the harmonium in the [drama] Company, and also began to learn Hindi when three years later, my voice cracked. Meanwhile, I had begun reading Gandhiji's *Harijan*, in which there were exhortations to choose specific courses to serve the country. The courses suggested included going to jail, learning the *rashtrabhasha*, and several others that I no longer remember. I was not so keen on going to jail, so I began to learn Hindi.[5]

ITEM: For many years, Hindi used to be called "swarajya-bhasha", and the Hindi-based examinations that the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan used to conduct all over the country—an alternative "nationalist" track in education—were described proudly as

"swarajya-parikshaaen". Yet in 1938, when Hazari Prasad Dwivedi who was then in Santiniketan, was invited to join the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan he declined:

> मेरा सब काम चौपट हो जाएगा। लोग समझेंगे यह भी हिन्दी प्रचारक है... हिन्दी प्रचार का कार्य स्वार्थ-मूलक समझा जाता है....[6]
>
> All my work will be ruined. People will think that I too am a Hindi propagandist—and this work of spreading Hindi is believed, basically, to spring from self-interest.

ITEM: In May-June 1938, there was a meeting of the provincial Sahitya Sammelan in Faizabad, attended by many people including Nirala and Purushottam Das Tandon, Narendra Dev and Sampurnanand. Ramchandra Shukla was also present, but was marginalized by the politicians. It appears that Nirala—already one of the biggest names in Hindi literature—was alarmed by the way in which the organisation had been taken over by people with a political/communal agenda, and attempted to raise his voice against it. He was manhandled by the "schoolmasters" and their loutish acolytes and made to shut up. Talking about the incident later, Nirala was prescient about the emergent "Hindi" culture of intolerance and servility:

> हिन्दी वालों की एक अदृश्य दुम लगी होती है।[7]
>
> Hindiwallas are endowed with an invisible tail.

Interestingly, the report in *Saraswati* made no mention of the ructions caused by Nirala.

* * *

I am trying to track a transformation here in the image and appeal of Hindi: the discursive space of the people's vernacular Hindi that had first attracted the support of Bankim and Gandhi, was progressively usurped by Sanskritic "Hindi". This is a fundamental transformation whose gravity, *and often even existence*, has been masked by the superficial continuity in the name by which the radically different linguistic variants are designated. In 1918, when Tandon had demurred at Gandhi's suggestion that he should devote his energies to the propagation of Hindi in South India

in order to make good on Hindi's *national* claim, Gandhi had told him, *in that case*, to resign from the Secretaryship of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.[8] In 1945 however, after Gandhi had been successfully marginalised by the "Hindi" ideologues who could brook no compromise with his Hindi, *it was Gandhi who was left with no option but to resign.*[9] Tandon's "Hindi" was not the Hindi that Gandhi had made the centre-piece of his national strategy.

Apart from the continuity in the name *Hindi*, there is one other factor that has helped to camouflage this coup. As we have seen earlier, Sanskritising the people's vernacular—filial relationship, lexical borrowing, etc.—was an important tactic in the *regional* power struggle. However, once this regional elite had consolidated its position, it was able to extend the Sanskritising strategy in the service of its now-national design. The people's vernacular had been distinguished by its diverse borrowings, its flexibility, its local sensitivities, its enormous geographical and social reach, and therefore proposed as the language of the national movement. But the ideologues were able to substitute for this a *rashtrabhasha* "Hindi" that was characterised by its uniformity, its *absence* of local colouring. The President of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1949, K.C.Chattopadhyaya declared: "Pure Sanskrit words are used in the same form everywhere. Therefore only that language can be acceptable all over India which is rich in pure Sanskrit words.[10] The continuity in the name masks the fact that we are talking about a different kind of language—*and, implicitly, a different kind of nation, too.*

Sanskritised "Hindi", produced as we have seen in the exigencies of a *regional* politics, was now available—purified of locality, historical adulteration, regional colour—as a vehicle of "national" aspiration for a regional upper-caste elite. That Hindi which was merely local, marked by the specific usages of specific people, was unsuitable—precisely because it belonged to *a* people, it could not pretend to belong to all, *or almost all*, the people. On the other hand, this artificially Sanskritised "Hindi" could lay claim to the real (but also mythical) excellences of ancient Indian culture, and could plausibly be considered "national". Unfortunately, it was also and inescapably bound up with the culturally exclusive, socially divisive and ultimately upper-caste and anti-democratic politics which had produced it. It could only be the "mother

tongue" of the "nation" which *it* produced—or, in a gory mixed metaphor, carved out of the existing, heterogeneous nation.

As a matter of fact, Hindi's "national" claim has always been problematic. Thus, is Hindi *national* because of what it is, or, what it can become? Or does Hindi's national claim derive from what the "nation" is? Or what the nation can become—or should become, or strenuously be sought to be made to become? (There is an analogous ambiguity in the meanings of "Hindu"—simultaneously geographical, religious, and national, simultaneously real and imaginary.)[11] "Hindi" could obviously not be the *rashtrabhasha* of an existing nation: the invention of this *rashtrabhasha* "Hindi" was simultaneously a linguistic and a political manoeuvre, the surreptitious insinuation of a new "nation" into public consciousness. Makhanlal Chaturvedi, veteran writer and journalist from Madhya Bharat, issued a remarkably prescient warning against the dangers of this "Hindi" nationalism in 1943:

> जब हम कठिन संस्कृत शब्द हिन्दी में ठूस कर उसकी गतिशीलता नष्ट करते हैं, तब हम भाषा के संतवाणी की तरह सरल होने के पथ में रोड़े अटकाते हैं और पाकिस्तान की माँग का सिद्धान्ततः समर्थन करते हैं।[12]
>
> When we destroy Hindi's natural fluency by forcing difficult Sanskrit words into it, then we put obstacles in the path of the language remaining simple like the language of the saint-poets, and thereby provide ideological support to the demand for Pakistan.

As it happens, Pakistan and Partition cast a long shadow over the crucial debates regarding *rashtrabhasha Hindi* in the Constituent Assembly. To begin with, Hindi had a huge bank of goodwill to draw upon. As Granville Austin tells it: "At first, the general sentiment in favour of an Indian national language blinded all concerned to the problems involved. But as the members framed the language provisions, they became aware of the difficulties and of their disagreements. Then the split began to grow slowly and steadily. The Hindi-wallahs, unremittingly militant, pressed their demands. The moderates retreated in an attempt to preserve national unity and peace within the Assembly."[13] The matter of language was repeatedly deferred in order to avoid splitting the

Constituent Assembly which was, sensibly, committed to working through accommodation and consensus rather than through simple majorities. The Hindi-wallahs, on the other hand, had declared that they would impose Hindi on the whole country even if they had a one-vote majority—but these hot-heads were contained by wiser leaders like Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel and Govind Ballabh Pant who, while they were sympathetic to Hindi, were unwilling to let the process of Constitution-making itself founder on the rock of "Hindi" intransigence.

The Language Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly had recommended that "Hindustani written ... either in Devnagari or the Persian script shall, as the national language, be the first official language of the Union". English was to be the second official language "for such period as the Union may by law determine." However, meeting to consider this recommendation on 14 July 1947 under the shadow of the imminent Partition, the Hindi-wallahs mounted a furious attack on this formulation: Hindi, not Hindustani, they demanded; Nagari and only Nagari! And won, for the time being—won the battle, not the war.

Looking back on these debates, however, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was the "intolerance and fanaticism" of the Hindi-wallahs that finally killed Hindi as a real constitutional option, as opposed to a mere symbolic one. By the time the Constituent Assembly finally came around to debating the matter—between 1 August and 14 September 1949—the lines were clearly drawn. On the one side, there were the delegates from the Hindi-speaking states, led by Tandon; on the other side were all those who were alarmed at the emergence of what was described, *at that time*, as "language imperialism" and even, specifically, "Hindi-imperialism".[14] No doubt they felt reassured by Ravi Shankar Shukla:"...I can say to my friends in the South that so far as they are concerned, it would be in their best interests to learn Hindi as early as possible, because if they do not learn Hindi quickly enough, they will be left behind."[15] S.P.Mookerjee, sometime President of the Hindu Mahasabha, asked delicately, why have "many people belonging to non-Hindi-speaking provinces become a bit nervous about Hindi?"[16]

The answer might lie in the Hindi-wallahs somewhat rough understanding of democracy. They spoke, of course, from a position

of democratic superiority and consequent moral advantage—because they claimed to speak in the name of the "small people", the silent majority. R.V.Dhulekar taunted the people who were resisting the Hindi extremists: "Are they afraid of democracy? Are they afraid of Parliament? Are they afraid of their own sons and grandsons who will be the members of our future Parliaments?"[17] Seth Govind Das explained what democracy meant: "...democracy can only function when majority opinion is honoured. If we differ on any issue, that can only be decided by votes. Whatever decision is arrived at by the majority must be accepted by the minority respectfully and without any bitterness."[18] Given the inability of the Hindi nationalists to distinguish between democracy and simple majoritarianism, the fears of the non-Hindi delegates might well have been justified—but in the event, it was a *democratic* resistance to Hindi extremism that shaped the final compromise.

The compromise formula that was finally accepted is known as the Munshi-Ayyangar formula—although Ambedkar is also listed as one of its sponsors. Hindi was to be the official language but, crucial proviso, English was to continue to be in use for fifteen years for official business. The Hindi-wallahs were numerous enough and vociferous enough—and indeed, still drawing on that bank of nationalist sentiment—to have their way. Almost. By the time the fifteen years came to an end, however, the ground realities had changed.

There is a small matter relating to the Eighth Schedule to the language chapter of the Constitution—Chapter 17—which gives us an idea of the surcharged atmosphere in which these debates were conducted. Austin is uncertain about where this Schedule, which lists the languages upon which Hindi was to draw for its enrichment, came from (p.298). However, a mimeographed account by one of the members of the Drafting Committee, M. Satyanarayan, provides us an interesting glimpse into the process. Nehru had asked him to draw up a list of languages, and he came up with a list of the twelve major regional languages of India. Nehru added a thirteenth, Urdu, before putting the list to the Committee. When "a Hindi friend" asked whose language this Urdu was, Nehru replied angrily:

> ये मेरी और मेरे बाप-दादाओं की भाषा है!
> This is my language, the language of my ancestors!

Thereupon the "Hindi friend" retorted:

> ब्राह्मण होते हुए उर्दू को अपनी भाषा कहते हो, शरम नहीं आती?
> Aren't you ashamed, being a Brahmin, to claim Urdu as your language?

Nehru did not reply. The Eighth Schedule was finally approved by the Constituent Assembly with the addition of one *more* language, Sanskrit.[19]

* * *

It remains to be asked: what happened to Hindustani? Of course there were moderate voices—notably Nehru—that spoke up for that Hindustani which, more than a language, was the name of an attitude of linguistic accommodation and generosity. Azad, for instance, reminded the Hindi fanatics that, irrespective of the precise dogma-driven formula which they managed to extract from the Constituent Assembly, it was still open to the people of the country "not to allow the shape of Hindi to be deformed."[20]

But the melancholy fact of the matter is that by that time, the idea of a shared, common language—Hindustani—could not command any significant constituency. The immediate context of Partition and Pakistan is no doubt relevant: Partition killed Hindustani.[21] One vociferous Hindi protagonist, R.V.Dhulekar, "advised" Maulana Hifzur Rahman: "Today if you speak for Hindustani, it will not be heard. You will be misrepresented, you will be misunderstood ... wait for two or three years and he [MHR] will have his Urdu language, he will have his Persian script; but today let him not try to oppose this, because our nation, the nation which has undergone so many sufferings is not in a mood to hear him."[22] But there is a deeper reason that must also be considered. Because of its origins in a specific regional politics, the defence of "Hindustani" had become identified with a *status quo*-ist defence of privilege.

Of course one may say that in the Constituent Assembly the "Hindi" elite tried to pull off the same subterfuge that the Avadh elite pulled off—representing a sectional interest as a "national" one. While the latter got their Pakistan—and, as muhajirs in

Punjabi-dominated Pakistan, their comeuppance—the former are still yearning for theirs. But one can hardly fail to notice the wholly undeserved populist energy that the politics of "Hindi nationalism" still derives from its history of challenging the world of elite privilege, at least in U.P. That vanished Avadh elite has been substituted by the English-speaking secular elite of contemporary India—but this latter elite is poorly positioned even to comprehend, let alone preempt the popular energies that the "Hindi" elite can command with hypocritical ease.

In order for Hindustani—both "language" and corresponding "nation"—and, by extension, for the idea of a common culture and a common language, to continue to have democratic purchase, it was (*and is*) imperative that its link with this historical defence of privilege be broken. When the Hindi ideologue speaks in the name of "...we small people [who] are wedded to poverty, wedded to the freedom of our country, to the freedom of our country from bondage, and from the bondage of a foreign language"[23], his bluff has to be called. But it could not be called either by those who spoke from the crumbling feudal culture of Avadh, or even by their English-gabbling successors now. The defence of Hindustani could only have worked *as part of an alternative, transformative politics*, not as a nostalgic defence of a threatened status quo. For reasons that lie well beyond the scope of the present tract, this alternative politics was not available: "Hindustani" became an incidental casualty of this political default.

* * *

The years between the unconsummated triumph of 1950 and the anticipated climax of 1965, when the enforced cohabitation with English, as per the Munshi-Ayyangar formula, would come to an end and Hindi come into its own, appear deceptively quiet. In the Hindi world itself, the ideologues and the pedants were assiduously at work, grooming Hindi for its exalted "national" role. This is the period of the growth and consolidation of the Hindi industry, of Dr Raghuvira and his many clones and acolytes, busily inventing whole ranges of terminology, going flatfootedly not only into areas of intellectual and academic endeavour but also into areas of quotidian practice where invention was, at best,

superfluous. Some of their coinages, often apocryphal, became the subjects of popular ridicule, and a hardy folklore developed around their grotesque Sanskritic reinventions of perfectly familiar everyday words: *lauh-path-gamini* for "train", whether real or only apocryphal, is symptomatic of what these professional Hindi-wallahs were perceived to be up to, at considerable cost to the public exchequer. And mere ridicule was insufficient to shake them out of their complacency, their slavering expectation of imminent triumph.

Meanwhile, however, in other parts of the country, the political mobilisations that led, eventually, to the linguistic reorganisation of the States in 1956, were getting under way. One aspect of these mobilisations, certainly, was the cultural assertion of the different linguistic groups—but an equally significant aspect of these was the end of the provisional deference to Hindi, which was a legacy of the freedom struggle. The DMK in Tamil Nadu had, of course, led the way in voicing the apprehensions (and indeed the resentment) of the non-Hindi regions with regard to the cultural domination of Hindi. Indeed, as we have seen in the context of the Constituent Assembly debates, the Hindi ideologues themselves left little room for ambiguity as to their arrogant, hegemonic intentions. I have a memory of Sant Kumar Tandon, son of the Maharshi P.D. Tandon himself, addressing a gathering of the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha in Madras in the middle 1950s, and telling them—remember, these were the people who were *favorably* disposed towards Hindi—that they had better learn Hindi quickly, or else...—for 1965 was but a few years away.

In 1956, the Central Advisory Board of Education considered at length the complex problem of language teaching in the context of the very real diversity of languages in the country, as well as the needs of a democratic polity that had adopted certain Constitutional requirements. This was the origin of the famous "three-language formula". This sought, substantially, to create a formal equality between Hindi and the other Indian languages by requiring people in the Hindi regions to learn another Indian language, while requiring non-Hindi users, in pursuit of that vaunted Constitutional goal, to learn Hindi. The third language was supposed to be "a modern European language" but it was, almost exclusively, English. A simplified version of the formula

originally proposed was approved by the conference of Chief Ministers in 1961. The hope that inspired this proposal was to promote emotional integration between different language speakers, as well as to equalise the burden of language learning as between Hindi-wallahs and the others.

However, the implementation of the three-language formula was, at best, defective. Barring a few states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, Hindi instruction in the non-Hindi states remained neglected. And as for the Hindi belt itself, here the third language requirement—another Indian language—was sought to be met with palpable dishonesty by substituting Sanskrit, or Urdu, or indeed, other Hindi variants or "dialects".[24] This ensured the instant demise of the three-language formula of course, but it also reopened the ever-available possibility of an earlier form of linguistic and cultural politics. This is not the place to go into the story of the fate of Urdu in the land of its birth, except to say that the inertial continuity of that earlier politics ensured that, until its spell was broken, no sensible option was even possible. Thus, should Urdu have been admissible as a third language in *addition* to Hindi—or as an *alternative* to it? A little thought would make it apparent that *both* the options are based on the *a priori* and false but self-fulfilling assumption that Hindi and Urdu are in fact two different languages. Thus, if "Hindi" was accepted as Hindi, then Urdu must necessarily be different, and would, inevitably, become "Urdu". The poisoned history poisons all possible choices so long as the given situation is accepted as given.

In anticipation of the Constitutional deadline of 1965, the Lok Sabha again took up the question of India's official language in 1963. As had happened during the Constituent Assembly debates, vociferous opinions were expressed for and against the immediate implementation of the original Constitutional provision of declaring Hindi to be the sole official language in 1965. In the event, the Official Languages Act of 1963 accepted that Hindi would become the sole official language in 1965, with the crucial provision that English was to be retained as an "associate additional official language". The Act made provision for a Parliamentary review committee which would reconsider the situation after ten years, with the power to recommend (or not) the further retention of English after that. Nehru assured the representatives from the non-

Hindi regions that Hindi would not be imposed upon them, but after Nehru's death in 1964, the next Prime Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda initiated some pro-Hindi moves, including asking different agencies of Government "what steps they proposed to take to use Hindi" after the designated and fateful day of transition—26 January 1965. When news of these reached Tamil Nadu, it exploded in violence, with demonstrations, riots, and flamboyant self-immolations. And then a 1967 amendment to the Official Languages Act of 1963 wrote Nehru's assurance into law—that English would be retained as "associate additional official language", that Hindi would never become the sole official language so long as even a single non-Hindi state demurred.

Meanwhile, of course, there were hectic mobilisations in the Hindi belt also in anticipation of 1965. These drew upon a significantly broad band of support. Thus, key resolutions in the Hindi Sangharsh Samiti agitation of 1964, against the continuation of "official" English beyond the initial Constitutional deadline of 1965—had as proposers Bishambhar Nath Pande, veteran Gandhian and diehard secularist; Hardev Bahri, distinguished lexicographer; Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Congress politician, later immured in some Raj Bhavan; and Murli Manohar Joshi, one of the key executors of the BJP's ideological agenda.[25] But all this—and the more populist style of Lohia's followers—was of no avail. As the Constitutional deadline came—and, then, went—the mood changed to one of bewilderment, and of angry resentment, even desperation. The *"Angrezi Hatao"* agitation of these years—rough, anarchic—was worlds removed from the staid, even smug confidence that had kept the ideologues happy in the period before 1965.

* * *

Meanwhile, "associate additional" English continues to be dominant. English is the great usurper, the great road-block on the path of Hindi's fervently desired consummation as *the* sole official national language. A command of English gives to a certain class social and other access which the Hindi world can only dream of. Back in the 1960s, in the heyday of Lohia's *Angrezi Hatao* agitation, English signboards and nameplates were a prime target. But today even the international situation seems to have turned

in favour of the English-knowing, so that even in those States which had gone some distance towards reducing the importance of English and empowering the vernacular—West Bengal, Bihar, U.P.—there has been a retreat, and English has made a comeback both in the state, and where the state is laggard, in the non-state sectors.

And yet, no one can seriously imagine that the current dominance of English can be anything other than fraught and unstable. English is too much the language of privilege, it is too visibly a symbol of a ruling elite whose social base and claim to legitimacy is becoming ever narrower and ever more untenable. English cannot easily break out of its narcissistic confinement, its historical complicity with a scavenging elite. But "Hindi", burdened with its *own* repressed history, its own suspect legitimacy, confined to its own upper-caste elite with its divisive and lethal national design, cannot really challenge English. Though it must perforce remain unacknowledged, there is even a kind of mutual dependence between English and "Hindi": their complementary disabilities impart a kind of stability to the status quo. Each holds the other in check: *in its place, but also, by implication, in place.*

Over the course of its development, for understandable reasons, "Hindi" has developed a siege mentality. It has defined itself against a range of other contenders for so long—Urdu but not only Urdu in the earlier phase, English later—that a kind of prickly defensiveness has become one of its deepest characteristics. Thus, there is not only an *external* economy that binds it to English: the two of them, acting in unacknowledged and probably unconscious collusion, appropriating and deflecting popular energies, endow the status quo with a greater durability than it deserves. But there is an *internal* economy also. With the Urdu challenge effectively gone, English is now the *necessary other* that prevents "Hindi" from coming to terms with its past. A blocked "Hindi", unable to advance *also* because of its intrinsic and unacknowledged contradictions, its repressed history, *invents* an English elite oppressor. Like the futile few reading excerpts from Rushdie's *Moor* to each other, on behalf of Sahmat, one winter morning...

* * *

"Hindi" is a dwindled thing today. The thwarted climax of 1965 is a distant memory. There are no more dates to wait for. Creative writers have in any case always paid scant heed to the official ideology of "Hindi", been less vulnerable to the material and psychological motivations that shaped it. This has become ever more the case since the "Hindi" movement waned and then sank in the slough of official patronage. The founding institutions of "Hindi" are now merely degenerate kleptocracies.

So why does "Hindi" matter any more, matter enough for us to be writing (and indeed reading) this tract? Because for all its irrelevance to the real world of literary practice, and to the world of everyday language use, this "Hindi" continues to exert a poisonous influence through its continued dominance within the education system. Because of its strategic location within the organs of ideological reproduction, both in the Hindi region and beyond, this spent "Hindi" continues to spread its radioactive poison. It vitiates the relationship between writers and their publics; it corrupts taste and conduces towards the propagation of dangerous cultural values. This official "Hindi" is primarily responsible for the construction of cultural memory in the Hindi region: in classroom after classroom, in childish essay and scholarly dissertation, the practice of this "Hindi" is a ritual re-enactment of the logic of partition:

> पाकिस्तानी उर्दू छोड़ो, हिन्दुस्तानी हिन्दी सीखो;
> अपनी भाषा, रीति-नीति को अपनाओ, हिन्दू से दीखो।[26]
> Abjure Pakistani Urdu, learn Hindustani Hindi—
> Adop your own language, your own customs and traditions—
> Appear like a Hindu!

But it works its havoc in other ways too. The persistence of "Hindi" legitimises a particular distinction between high and popular discourse—*to the detriment of both*. The distortions of "high" discourse we have already seen at some length. But the popular discourse that develops in the shadow of this unchallenged *hierarchy of discourses*—that develops as an "other" of this "Hindi"—carries the imprint of its genetic defect. This is the world of vernacular discourse in which high "Hindi" and the bazaar Hindi in which one orders servants and vegetables, or its grotesque cousin Zee Hindi, are the only available linguistic alternatives.

In an important essay, D.L. Sheth suggests that in order to break out of the present impasse, Hindi must get beyond the unnecessarily antagonistic relationship with the "other" Indian languages—the so-called "regional languages"—into which it was cast by the perverted nationalism of the "Hindi" ideologues. To them, it appeared as if their "Hindi" could be simply a successor to English and its associated regime. He suggests, indeed, that Hindi should ally with these other languages. Then, having first got "Hindi" out of the way, it can attend, in alliance with the other languages, to the overdue business of creating a national vernacular counter-elite that can truly confront English and its unjust order. Sheth makes a complex argument: by recognising their "regionality", the regional languages and their associated elites can attain to national consequence.[27] However, this process cannot even get under way until the usurper pseudo-nationalist "Hindi" is allowed to stand in the way. Hindi must first get its own house in order.

"Hindi"'s national status is, I would argue, doomed to remain symbolic. Unless, of course, it can engineer a "nation" commensurate with itself: Hindu savarna, Brahminical, pure—in fact, another, a Hindu Pakistan. For Hindi, on the other hand, to resume its necessary national destiny, it would have to distance itself from those regional elites—not to put too fine a point on it, Hindi belt savarna—whose lust for "nationality" produced "Hindi" in the first place. Only thus could it hope to break free from a crippling cultural politics and regain its regional character and loyalties. Clearly, however, such a process would have consequences far beyond the matter of language per se. Just as the original distortion of Hindi into "Hindi" was itself the cause and symptom of a complex of social and material factors, similarly the reverse process of "Hindi"'s becoming Hindi once again can only happen as the effect and then also the trigger of a very different kind of politics.

* * *

"Hindi" matters, then, because Hindi matters. Hindi is clearly the ineluctable language of democratic citizenship in the Hindi

belt. And it is Hindi that has enabled the people of this diverse country in centuries past to communicate with each other. There is after all no reason, other than the greedy impatience of the savarna Hindi elite, to insist that their language must become the language of governance immediately. Once the goal of democratic and participative citizenship is accepted in respect of all the people of this country, governance can happen in the available local languages. In the Hindi heartland, this will be Hindi, with all its variants, and not "Hindi". And the needs of communication between different regions will ensure, in the longer term, the emergence of some common language which, historical experience suggests, will be something like Hindi. But this process cannot even begin until the usurper "Hindi" stands in the way.

Interestingly enough, something like this was anticipated by the Hindi poet Dhoomil, in a poem—*'Bhasha ki Raat'*—that situates itself in the context of the language agitations of the 1960s—"*Angrezi-Hatao* (in N. India), *Hindi-Hatao* (in S. India)". Behind the *counterpoised* vernacular speakers of that bitter time, Dhoomil sees the "*asli kasaai*", the "real butcher", who feeds off *both* of them:

तुम्हारा ये तमिल-दुख
मेरी इस भोजपुरी पीड़ा का
भाई है
भाषा उस तिकड़मी दरिन्दे का कौर है।
Your Tamil pain
Is brother to my Bhojpuri pain—
Language is merely a morsel for the deceitful beast...

It is remarkable that in the midst of the chauvinist fervour generated around that fateful deadline of 1965, Dhoomil was able to say:

भाषा ठीक करने से पहले आदमी को ठीक कर
आ! अपने चौदह मुखों से
बोलता हुआ आ![28]
Speak from all your fourteen mouths, speak in all the fourteen languages of India, speak!—and demand that the human problem be attended to before the linguistic one can...

* * *

My narrative has been, in the main, a narrative of the violence that has been done to the people's vernacular Hindi by and in the name of "Hindi", the Sanskritic usurper. But I would not like to end by suggesting that the violence has been successful. It could not be. Because—as Hindi-wallahs themselves are wont to suggest in their poetic-democratic moods, you cannot actually stamp out the grass. It persists in hidden corners, it springs back to life:

> ये सरकारी हिन्दी नहीं है, ये परिनिष्ठित हिन्दी नहीं है, किन्तु राजनीतिज्ञों की स्वार्थ-नीति की चिन्ता न करके जो हिन्दी राष्ट्रभाषा बनी है वह यही हिन्दी है—अनेक रूपा, अपरिनिष्ठित, जीवन्त...[29]
>
> This is not official Hindi, this is not standardised Hindi—but this is this Hindi that has become the national language in spite of the selfish intrigues of politicians—this Hindi, various, anarchic, alive....

This Hindi, with all its glorious regional diversity, its sharp local flavours, continues to grow.

There is no cause for pessimism here. What has motivated this polemic is an attempt to bring a history of violence into consciousness. In the spirit of the psychoanalytical metaphor, my hope is to free Hindi from this repressed history of violence, and so enable it to become itself, to realise itself. By distancing itself from "Hindi", which is unmistakably a part of the problem, Hindi can work towards becoming a part of the solution. I am aware that waking up from this nightmare, in which it was ridden by its cruel Doppelganger "Hindi", will not be the end of the process. But it is a beginning.

Notes

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. R.B. Sharma (1978, passim).
2. Hansen Jaffrelot (1998).
3. Premchand, cited in R.B. Sharma (1978, p. 350).
4. See D.L. Sheth (1995) and Sudipta Kaviraj (1992).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. S. Bhattacharya (1997, p. 44).
2. *Sammelan Patrika, 'Rajarshi Tandon Janmashati Visheshank'*, p. 53. It seems that Maulana Azad too claimed the credit for having introduced Hindustani into the Congress constitution, see Granville Austin (1966, p. 271, fn 12).
3. Rahul Sankrityayan(1937, p. 231).
4. John Borthwick Gilchrist, The British Indian Monitor... (1806, lvii).
5. Introduction, Part I, vol. 1, p. 23.
6. From Musafiran-i-Landan, in Shackle/Snell (1990).
7. *The Problem of Hindustani* (1944, pp. 77-80).
8. V. Dalmia (1997), p. 153 fn.
9. In Qava'id-i-Urdu (1914). Excerpt in Shackle/Snell (1990).
10. Guleri (1988, p. 114).
11. Sitaram Chaturvedi (1993 Vikram, Part II, p. 28).
12. Ashok Kelkar (1968).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Cited by Malaviya in Court Character and Primary Education in NWP & O (1897), quoting the Printed Parliamentary Papers.

2. Hali, (p. 125).
3. King (1994, pp. 74–75).
4. Robinson (1971).
5. Robinson (1993, p. 134).
6. In MacDonnell Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
7. See Das (1978). Also see Dalmia (1997, p. 169).
8. George Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan* (1889, p. 107).
9. Ibid.
10. Sharma (1975, p. 191).
11. Washbrook (1991, pp. 188–9).
12. Bhatia (1987).
13. Thapar (1989).
14. Sharma (1975, pp. 201–2); also see Dalmia (1997)
15. Shukla (1929, p. 232).
16. Kaviraj (1992a).
17. Cohn (1985, p. 298).
18. Gilchrist, in ibid. p. 302.
19. The detailed story is available in King (1994, pp. 69–71).
20. This section relies largely on King (1994), chapter four: 'Language, Education and Employment'.
21. For "Urdu", see Rai (1984), on the Language Reform Movement; for "Hindi", see Dalmia (1997, p. 160).
22. Gilchrist, The British Indian Monitor..., (1806), p. 295, and passim.
23. See the Introductory Note to Fallon (1879) *A New Hindustani-English Dictionary.*
24. King (1994, p. 103).
25. *A Sketch of the Hindustani Language,* Edinburgh (1880, p. 9).
26. Proceedings of the Education Dept, NWP&O (1884, in IOL).
27. Proceedings of the Education Dept, NWP&O (1903, p. 37).
28. Robinson (1993, p. 141).
29. King (1994, p. 148).
30. U.P. Education Report, 1915–16.
31. Pratap Narain Misra, 'Triptyantaam'.
32. Bayly (1973).
33. Misra (1956, p. 119). Also see Rawat (1998).
34. Report by the NWP&O Provincial Committee with Evidence Taken before the Commission and Memorials addressed to the Education Commission, Calcutta (1884; p. 73).
35. Robinson (1971, p. 323).
36. Lelyveld (1978, p. 101).
37. See Brass (1974).

38. Bayly (1983, p. 356).
39. Cited in Fallon's 1879 *Hindustani Dictionary* (p. 100).
40. See Bayly (1983) and King (1991, passim).
41. Strictures upon the Strictures of Sayyad Ahmad Khan Bahadur, Benares (1870, p. 16).
42. Stout (1976, p. 425).
43. Memorandum: Court Characters in the Upper Provinces of India, Benares (1868, p. 5).
44. Cited in Srivastava, *Annual of Urdu Studies,* No. 10 (p. 233).
45. Bhatt (Samvat 1998), December 1899 essay entitled 'Hindu Jaati ka Svabhaavik Guna", in *Nibandavali.*
46. Ramgopal (Śaka 1886, p. 9).
47. UPNNR
48. In Chaturvedi (1973, p. 161).
49. Cited, Francesca Orsini, forthcoming.
50. May 1892, in IOL.
51. King (1991, p. 128).
52. Hali (1976, p. 124–5).
53. Ibid. (pp. 123–7).
54. Memorandum (p. 5).
55. Hunter Commission testimony—see ref. 34 above (p. 327).
56. Hali (1976, p. 124).
57. In Misra (1956, p. 141).
58 Cited King (1991, p. 135).
59. *Saraswati,* Hirak Jayanti Ank, ed. Srinarain Chaturvedi, Allahabad: Indian Press (1961).
60. Cited in Nandalal Chatterjee, 'A Forgotten Official Inquiry...' (p. 31).
61. *Hindi Pradip,* May-July (1901).
62. UPNNR
63. UPNNR
64. UPNNR
65. UPNNR
66. UPNNR
67. Reconstructed from MacDonnell Papers and King (1994).
68. Robinson (1993, p. 44, fn 2).
69. UPNNR. Particularly *Pioneer,* 11 August 1900.
70. In MacDonnell Papers.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Cited by Padma Singh Sharma in *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan,* vol. 2, p.130.

2. Cited in Chatterjee (1955).
3. Ibid.
4. See King (1991, pp. 83–4).
5. Vedalankar (1969, p. 154).
6. King 1991 (p. 83).
7. Ibid (p. 68).
8. Ibid.
9. Cited in *Hindi Bhasha/Nagari Lipi* (p. 219).
10. Lucy Stout, Kayastha ts.
11. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan* vol. 1 (p. 85).
12. Chatterji (1955).
13. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*vol. 2 (p. 317).
14. King (1991, p. 124).
15. Bayly (1975, p. 119).
16. Tanika Sarkar, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 Sept 1994.
17. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, forthcoming.
18. Guha (1988, p. 67).
19. Dalmia (1996, p. 287).
20. *Oudh Akhbar*, published by the Nawal Kishore Press. Cited in King (1974, p. 402).
21. Lelyveld (1978, p. 307).
22. Abhyudaya, 13 November (1908, p. 5).
23. UPNNR
24. Cited in King (1974, p. 418).
25. Ibid., p. 428.
26. Robinson (1993, p. 141).
27. Jalal/Seal (1981).
28. Pirzada, *Foundations*, vol.1, p. 74.
29. UPNNR
30. Jalal/Seal (1981).
31. King (1991, p. 59).
32. Bayly (1975, p. 119).
33. Low (1968, p. 12).
34. Cited in K.S. Singh (1992, p. 82). It is unlikely that Sir Syed wrote "lipi" - but "rasm-ul-khat" would have been incomprehensible to Singh's Hindi readers.
35. Pande (1957, p. 219).
36. Anjum (1998).
37. Jalal/Seal (1981).
38. Ibid.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. King (1990). This is obviously not a verbatim report: the use of "dialects" already assumes the existence of a standard language.
2. Chaturvedi (1973, pp. 32–34).
3. FO, 2.5/17.
4. Krishna Kumar 199 , 'Hindu Revivalism...'.
5. Guleri (1988, p. 41).
6. Pritchett (1994).
7. Sharma (1977).
8. Chaturvedi (1973), p. 15
9. Sitaram (1930, p. 44).
10. Chaturvedi (1986, p. 118 and passim).
11. Alam (1998, p. 331).
12. S.R. Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, OUP, forthcoming.
13. Lelyveld (1993).
14. Lelyveld (1994).
15. Faruqi, forthcoming, p. 74
16. Hali's review of Farhang-i-Asafiya, cited in Sharma (1932, p. 43).
17. Even the *tatsama* drive towards reviving the "pure" Sanskrit forms of words is justified, by Malaviya, on the grounds that in the run of time, the meanings of words have changed greatly, thereby affecting "our" beliefs and practices etc. and consequently our life as a community. Until the pure forms of those words are put once again before the people, he writes, reforming the Hindu "jati" will be very difficult. See Chaturvedi, 1993 Vikram, p. 98.
18. Poromesh Acharya, EPW, 1986.
19. Pollock (1998).
20. *Sammelan Patrika*, Tandon Smriti Ank, p.259; lecture delivered 20 Oct 1938.
21. *Rachanavali*, vol. III, p. 478.
22. Firaq (1971).
23. Balmukund Gupt,passim.; Harioudh, *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*, vol. 2, in Delhi 1923.
24. Sitaram Chaturvedi, ed. *Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya Commemoration Volume*, 1993 Vikram, part 1, p. 46.
25. In Singh (1958, p. 202).
26. Sharma (1977, p. 244).
27. Misra (1970); Singh (1952).
28. Rahul Sankrityayan. Also see (1937, pp. 237–245); *Sammelan Patrika, Tandon Smriti Ank*, p. 260; Sharma (1975, p. 158); Nespital, (1990).
29. *Yaadon ki Baraat*, p. 128; edn Delhi (1997).
30. Guleri (1988, pp. 217–26); a 1905 memoir.

31. Cited in Misra (1956, p. 167).
32. Ibid. p. 9.
33. Kausalyayan (1986, p. 163).
34. Guleri (1988, p. 218).
35. In Sahay/Sharma (1960, p. 69).
36. In Misra (1956).
37. Ibid., p. 74.
38. Ibid. p. 229.
39. In Lakshmichand (1963).
40. Sharma, (1978), partic. pp. 277–285
41. Hindusthan, 3 April 1888; cited Sahay/Sharma (1960, p. 89).
42. King (1991, pp. 151–2).
43. *Rashtrabhasha Hindi* (1962, p. 29).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Hunter Commission testimony, in Ramgopal (Saka 1886).
2. Dalmia (1997, pp. 190–191).
3. Hunter Commission testimony.
4. Cited in King (1974, p. 292).
5. Misra (1956, p. 14).
6. Sharma (1977).
7. *Granthavali*, vol.2, p.881; cited in Guleri (1988, p. 181).
8. Dalmia (1997, pp. 29–30).
9. See Bayly (1973).
10. Ibid.
11. Misra (1956, p. 233).
12. Chaturvedi (1973, Adikala, pp. 84–85).
13. Singh (1958, p. 48).
14. Ibid., Preface.
15. In Sahay/Sharma (1960, p. 83).
16. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*, vol. 2, p. 140.
17. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*, vol. I, p. 136.
18. Final testimony.
19. Shukla (1948).
20. Orsini (1999).
21. Ibid.
22. At a conference on *bhasha na samjhi janen waali bhashayen*, i.e. languages that are not recognised as languages, held at Delhi in 1999.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Pandit Vamanrao Pethe and Bankim are variously credited with having originated the idea, but Guleri (1988, p. 329) cites a Baba Kishan Das Niranjani who, in 1872, published this: *bhaiyo jab takke hindustan mein ek lipi, ek bhasha, ek dharm na hoga tab takke hindustan mein purna sudharna na hogi... .*
2. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*, p. 99.
3. Gandhi, *Thoughts on National Language*, p. 31.
4. Premchand *Vividh Prasang*, vol. 3, p. 290.
5. *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*, No. 2, April 1994.
6. Dwivedi to Banarasi Das Chaturvedi on 3 April 1938; in Chaturvedi Papers, NAI.
7. *Rachnavali*, vol. 6. pp. 198-210; this remark, p. 209.
8. *Sammelan Patrika*, Gandhi-Tandon Ank, p. 25.
9. Ibid., p. 37.
10. In Kausalyayan (1986), p. 154.
11. Dalmia (1997, pp. 32–36).
12. *Sabhapatiyon ke Bhashan*, vol. 2, p. 403.
13. Austin (1966, chapter 12)—Language and the Constitution - is the classic account of these debates. Real addicts can, of course, always go to the Constituent Assembly Debates — CAD — themselves. This remark, p. 267.
14. TTKrishnamachari, cited Retzlaff, (p. 382); TTK, Austin (1966, p. 283).
15. CAD, IX, 1420–21.
16. Austin (1966, p. 298).
17. CAD, IX, 1350.
18. Austin (1966, p. 302).
19. MS's account in author's possession.
20. CAD, IX, p. 1459.
21. Austin (1966, p. 277).
22. CAD, IX, p. 1351.
23. Dhulekar in CAD, IX, p. 1349.
24. This account of the three language formula relies on the Kothari Commission Report and Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence* (1990), Chapter 5.
25. Verma (1964, p. 193).
26. *Balsakha*, (1948); cited Krishna Kumar, 1991.
27. Sheth (1995).
28. Dhoomil, *Sansad se Sadak Tak*.
29. Sharma (1975, p. 272).

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This tract by Alok Rai looks at the politics of language in India through a study of the history of one language—Hindi. It traces the tragic metamorphosis of this language over the last century, from a creative, dynamic, popular language to a dead, Sanskritised, dePersianised language manufactured by a self-serving upper caste North Indian elite, nurturing hegemonic ambitions. From being a symbol of collective imagination it became a signifier of narrow sectarianism and regional chauvinism. The tract shows how this transformation of the language was tied up with the politics of communalism and regionalism.

Rai seeks to save Hindi from the politics of Hindi nationalism. If Hindi has to realise its inner potential and become a national language of communication, argues Rai, then it has to emancipate itself from its own repressed history, and dissociate itself from its deformed other—the Sanskritised Hindi of the pundits. It can only do this through a critical return to its troubled past. In returning to that past, Rai hopes to create the possibilities of a new future.

This is a powerful tract, written with emotion and passion, sparking with wit and ideas. It persuades us to rethink the question of National Language, and reflect on the tangled links between language,

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